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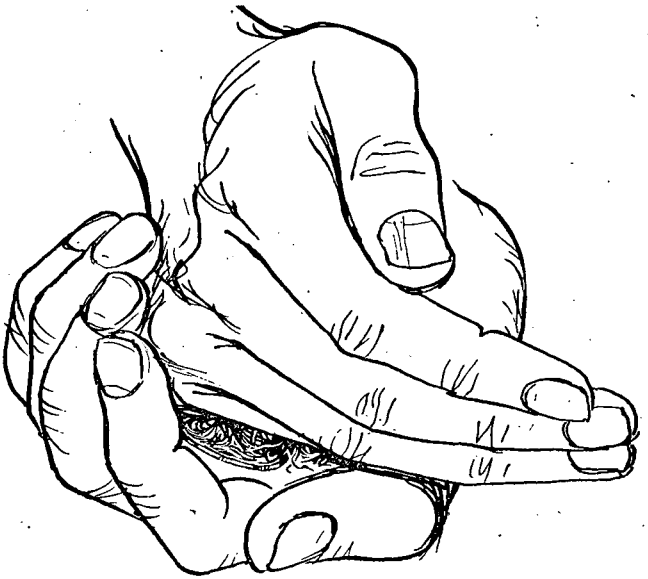

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ARGOSY

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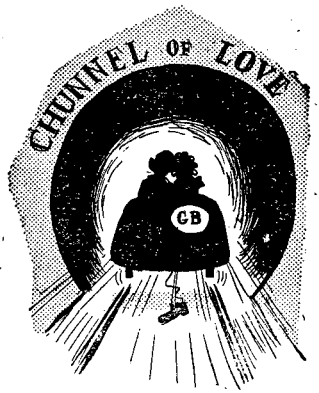

Log Book

AN advertisement for Liquid Seaweed was flanked in our daily paper by the announcement that during 1959 the final conclusions of the Channel Tunnel Group will be reached. We never did discover the virtues of Liquid Seaweed, though it sounds revoltingly beneficial, but the juxtaposition of the items made us reflect that although, following the advancement of science, our existence becomes more and more exciting and dreamlike in many respects, in other ways it is more and more depressingly down-to-earth. By the time there are cheap day returns to the moon we shall all be living on jellied Globigerina Ooze and processed Plankton.

However, and to turn from this sad thought, those boys in the Channel Tunnel Group are throwing away their opportunities if they don't make their project into a species of mammoth Ghost Train and Tunnel of Love combined, in which Riviera-bound couples can begin their honeymoons in the proper spirit, and jaded company directors put themselves into a suitable frame of mind for Paris.

The start will be a superbly sickening swoop from Dover down through a series of transparencies representing wrecked Channel steamers with eerily gibbering crews. After this, skeletons, sharks, and octopi will make lifelike pounces, and Davy Jones will fire one or two shots from his locker. Halfway across a Customs Officer disguised as a sea lion will bound out of a Douanier Rousseau jungle and nose through the luggage of the passengers, who by this time will be in no case to try to put anything across.

On the upward slope to Calais the atmosphere will subtly alter; the skeletons will be replaced by Folies Bergères mermaids, and the bucket-cars will whizz giddily through the Chambre

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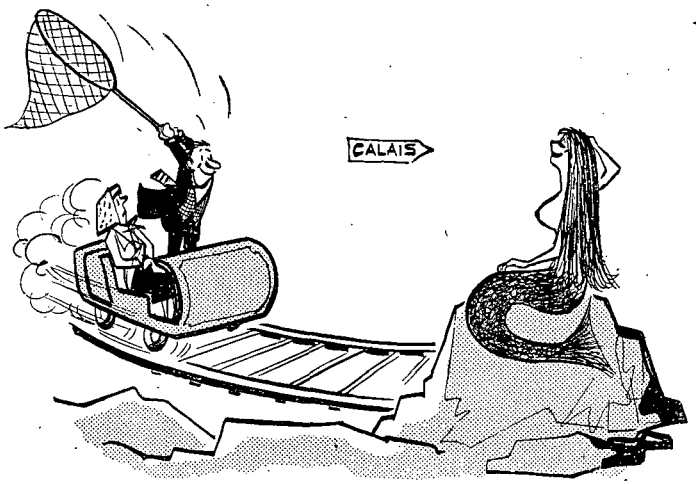
d'Amour, of which the less said the better. The climax will be a terrific acceleration and a maniac helter-skelter which tosses the passengers out of their own cars and into others, causing laughable confusion and immense hilarity.

Throughout the journey free drams of Liquid Seaweed will be copiously served by stewardesses in Sabrina uniforms, and undecorticated cotton-cakes and Samphirine tablets will be handed.

Mercifully there is a bookstall by the Dover ticket office; judicious purchase of a copy of Argosy before entraining will always provide an absorbing escape from the rigours of the journey for those who prefer their fiction first rate and their seaweed solid.

Geoffrey Household, whose new thriller *Tie up a Goat* we begin this month, has recently published his entertaining autobiography, *Against the Wind*. In it he describes himself as an amused observer of men and manners, who tries to present his goods to the passer-by with the clarity which politeness demands. His own favourite modern author is Sir Osbert Sitwell—"I question whether at any period of English literature his prose has been surpassed."

Gerald Kersh, one of the world's most plausible spinners of tall stories, has a theory that the Russians developed a nuclear



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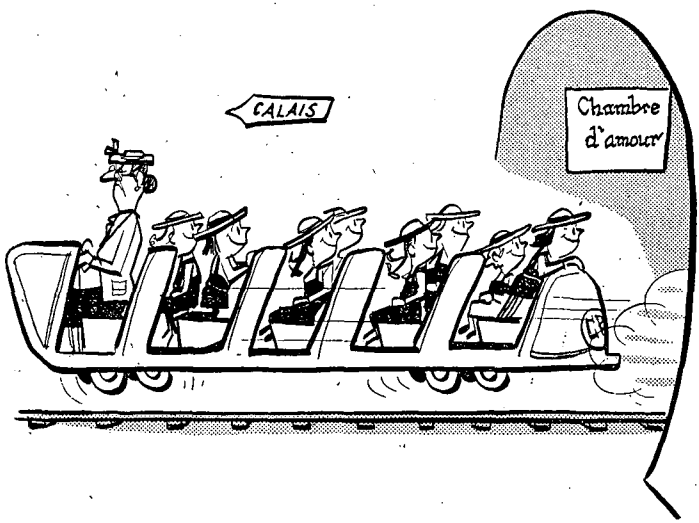
weapon project from an idea in his thriller *The Secret Masters*. Heaven knows what will be triggered off by his new book *Fowlers End*—which has one of the funniest time-bomb sequences we have ever come across. Another of his taller stories is to be found on page 81.

George Langelaan, whose thousand-dollar prize story *The Fly* we printed a few months ago, is right on form with the horrific *Strange Miracle* on page 67. Readers subject to qualms, take a deep breath before beginning!

Mary Turner read history at Cambridge, worked as a nurse in the Sudan during the war, and married a doctor. She has two sons, and says that she has been writing for innumerable years, very slowly.

Whether you whizzed through our quiz on page 20 without looking up the answers, or turned to page 143 for support and consolation, we hope that you found it amusing and informative. If your mind is well stocked with general knowledge, how about sending a quiz to Argosy? It should contain seven questions (can be all on one theme or not, as you wish) entertaining, and not *too* difficult. Answers too, please! Two guineas go for any entry that fills this bill.

JOHN SILVER



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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

PARIS IN SUMMER

" Paris, eh ? " said Sergeant Gwilliam
" You want to watch your step "

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

" WELL," said Superintendent Haxtell, " I must say, I think you've earned it."

" Thank you, sir," said Detective Sergeant Petrella, whose mind was several hundred miles away from the dreary mid-summer dustiness of Crown Road Police Station. It was ranging free, in Seville, under the orange trees. In his ears no longer sounded the grinding throb of traffic, as it panted up Highside Hill. He was sitting on the patio of the Villa Hernandez, listening to the chorus of the cicadas at sunset.

" It's a long time since you had a holiday."

" Eighteen months since I had a proper one," said Petrella.

" You'll be going abroad ? "

" I'm planning to spend most of it with my father, in Spain. On the way out I'm putting in a couple of days with one of my mother's great aunts in Paris."

" Somehow," said Haxtell, " I never have associated Paris with anyone's great aunt."

" She's a marvellous old lady. She's eighty-two. And she lives in a flat overlooking the avenue Victor Hugo, and spends her time with other old ladies and gentlemen, deploring modern youth and sipping abricotine."

Haxtell looked curiously at his subordinate. " You speak French, don't you ? " he said. " Proper French, I mean. Not just ' plume de ma tante ' stuff."

" I speak better French than Spanish," said Petrella. " Although I was born in Spain. We all moved to Bordeaux when I was eight, and I went to the ordinary French school there for five years. That's a good age for picking up a language, because you don't forget it again easily."

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"Well, behave yourself," said Haxtell. He wondered if he ought to tell Petrella that his promotion to Inspector was now practically on the plate. In fact, the only reason that it had not come through was that the person who could sign the most important documents was himself on holiday. He decided against it. If there was any hitch, it would have been better to have said nothing. When the news came through it would excuse all delays.

"Paris, eh?" said Sergeant Gwilliam, after lunch that day. "You want to watch your step."

"I shall be staying," said Petrella, "with my great aunt. Aged eighty-two."

"Well, mind you don't keep the old lady out of bed," said Gwilliam.

Detective Constable Wilmot was the youngest of the not-very-aged detective staff of Highside, and rather a protégé of Petrella. As they were all packing up to go home that evening Wilmot took him aside and said, "When you're in Paris, do you think you could give someone a letter for me?"

Petrella managed not to look surprised. "Yes, I could easily do that," he said.

"It's a girl," said Wilmot, blushing. "Perhaps I'd better explain about it."

"No reason to, if you don't want to."

"There's nothing to it, really. I've been writing to her. She's been writing to me. Pen pals. It started with something I seen in a magazine. I asked once or twice for a photograph, only she never sent me one."

"I see," said Petrella. "So you'd like me to deliver your next letter by hand, take a good look at her, and see if she's worth writing to."

"Thassit," said Wilmot. He had a great respect for Petrella's acumen. "If she turns out to be some old bag with dropped arches, I won't bother to write any more, see. But if she's a fizzer—well, that's different."

Petrella was on the point of saying that as long as she wrote interesting letters he couldn't see that it mattered much what she looked like, when he realized that he would be being priggish. So he simply said, "Write her name and address down and I'll see what I can do. If she's terrific, I might take her on myself."

Wilmot grinned and scribbled something on a piece of paper, which Petrella put into his wallet and forgot all about in the excitement and pleasure of organizing his departure.

His father, who was a believer in the comfort and dignity of

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travel, had sent him the money for his fare, and Petrella had booked a sleeper on the Night Ferry from Victoria. This is a very pleasant way to go to France. He climbed into his berth, and was asleep before the train was clear of the London suburbs. After that he woke twice. First, when the train stopped at Folkestone, and in the sudden stillness he heard the rattling of the chains and bolts as the carriages were locked to the ship; and some hours after that, to the gentle pitching of the summer-calm Channel. The next time he opened his eyes, fruit trees were flashing past the window, and the sleeping-car attendant, who seemed to have been transmogrified into a Frenchman, was telling him that breakfast was served.

It was when he stepped out of the Gare du Nord, and the summer heat of Paris hit him in the face, that he remembered Wilmot's letter.

Having no intention of imposing himself upon his elderly relative earlier than he need, he had deposited his bag in the consigne, intending to spend the day picking up his acquaintance with Paris where he had left it off some three years before.

Paris was like that. Not a woman, demanding constant attention, but a man, whose friendship you could enjoy, abandon, and take up again without the least hard feeling, exactly where you had dropped it.

He would have his midday meal at the Ruban Bleu, in a side street off the Place de l'Opéra; and his evening meal at the Beaux Arts, behind the Quai des Augustins. Between times, he would stroll slowly due west from the Petit Carrousel right down to the Bois, and then back again by the avenue Victor Hugo, where he would tantalize himself by imagining the things he would buy if he were a very rich man.

First, though, for Wilmot's girl-friend.

He read the name and address. Mlle Natalie Arture, 97 rue Antoine, 18. He turned the pages of the street guide. There was only one rue Antoine in the Eighteenth Arrondissement, and that, fortunately, was quite near the Gare du Nord. It was shown as a small, rather crooked street, running north from the Place de la Goutte d'Or.

Turn left at the end of the station. Then right, straight on for about two hundred yards, then right again. His nose glued to his street map Petrella took very little note of his surroundings. He crossed the Place de la Goutte d'Or. It seemed curiously empty for nine o'clock on a fine summer morning. There were two cafés in the Place, but neither of them had its sun awnings lowered or its chairs and tables out. The hush was sabbatical.

Petrella located the rue Antoine. It was even more crooked

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than the plan had suggested; a canyon of a street; tall, uninteresting houses rising to the sky on either side; the pavé chipped and dirty; no pavement, but a runnel of what he hoped was only water down the middle of the street.

For a moment he hesitated. As in all Paris streets, the numbering started at the point nearest the river; which meant that No. 97 would be a good way down this unsavoury-looking trap. Then it seemed to him that he was being unduly squeamish. Having got so far, it was silly not to complete his task.

It was the silence that was unnerving. The street itself was quite empty; the few shops that he passed were closed and barred; all windows giving on the street were shuttered. Halfway along he came to a place, round a sharp bend, where the cobble-stones which formed the pavé had been hacked up and removed. It afforded no obstacle to a pedestrian who could jump it, if nimble enough, or climb down into the shallow ditch and up on the other side. But nothing on wheels could have got past.

It was in his mind that he had seen something like it before, and then he remembered: the streets in the Moorish quarter in Seville had been so broken, to prevent motorists straying where they should not, but that had been during the plague epidemic.

The memory brought him up all standing. Then he reflected that what he was thinking was nonsense. There would have been police, officials, notices warning pedestrians; all the apparatus of a cordon sanitaire. He was letting his imagination run away with him.

No. 97 turned out to be a leather-worker's shop. The sign above the shop said, ANGRIFFE FRERES. It was bolted and barred, like all the rest.

Petrella rang the bell. Then he knocked a couple of times on the door. He wondered where Mlle Arture would fit into the house of a Monsieur Angriffe and his brothers. He wondered if any of the Angriffe family were at home. He wondered if anyone lived in the street at all.

Suddenly, quietly, and without any sound of bolts or locks, the door opened, and a man looked out. He was middle-aged, his skin was the colour of milky coffee, and he had black hair and a pair of brownish eyes, rimmed in yellow. He looked at Petrella, and said nothing at all.

Petrella said, " Mademoiselle Natalie—"

The man opened the door six inches wider. " You are a day late," he said, " but come in."

Petrella stepped over the threshold, and followed the man down the empty hall and into a kitchen at the end. He got the

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impression, as he went past, that the front rooms were all empty, but the kitchen was crowded. There were two women working at the stove, and another in front of the sink. A child was asleep in a cot in the corner, being rocked by an older girl. A boy of perhaps twelve, with bright mischievous eyes in a monkey face, squatted under the table. None of them seemed, at first sight, to be a very probable correspondent of Detective Constable Wilmot, of Q Division, Highside.

"Mademoiselle Natalie—" said Petrella again.

"Business," said the man. "Let us stick to business. Business before pleasure. If you will wait a moment."

He opened what looked like the door of a cupboard, and disappeared up a flight of steps. The occupants of the room stared at him in undisguised astonishment. There was nothing hostile about their interest. Indeed, he fancied he read, in the bright eyes of the boy, a sort of admiration.

The man of the house reappeared. He was holding a thick canvas envelope, a little larger than an ordinary registered envelope. Its shape indicated that it contained something more solid than paper.

He handed it to Petrella and said, "Will you tell your principal that this must terminate the matter. I think he will understand."

"I fear—" began Petrella. Then changed his mind abruptly. If something had gone wrong, if the whole of his errand was a mistake, the important thing was to get out of the house. The long, blind street was a trap. Apologies and excuses would come better from outside it.

Something more seemed to be expected of him. He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out Wilmot's letter. It was a long and conscientious piece of night-school French, and it contained, as Petrella knew, two photographs of Wilmot, one in plain clothes, and one in uniform. He wondered just what the Angriffe family would make of them.

"For Mademoiselle Natalie," he said, and handed the thick envelope to the man, who held out his hand and took it. The tips of his fingers pressed on the envelope, and Petrella knew that he was trying to detect whether there was money in it, and if so, how much.

"Remember," he said, putting as much authority into his voice as he could muster, "that is for Mademoiselle. In person. You understand? In person."

"Yes, yes," said the man hastily.

"Now I must go," said Petrella. For a moment the man looked as if he would have liked to say something more. Then he changed his mind, moved to the door, and opened it.

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As soon as the house door had shut behind him, Petrella started to walk very quickly. He wanted to run, and go on running until he was in front of the Gare du Nord, in sight of a gendarme. He had gone fifty yards when he heard the pattering of steps.

Looking over his shoulder he saw that it was the boy. On the slippery pavé his bare feet were making twice the speed of Petrella's iron-tipped shoes. There was no question—he would be caught before he reached the end of the street.

He thought it better to stop, and face about.

"Monsieur," said the boy, in nervous, sibilant French. "There has been a great mistake. Will you please hand back the envelope?"

"Not to you," said Petrella, "and not here. When I have seen what is in it, then perhaps."

"It would be better," said the boy.

"That is not for you to say."

Petrella half turned to go. He saw the knife out of the corner of his eye. It came up, in a silver stream, from the ground, clenched in the boy's small tight fist. Petrella jumped back, slipped, heard the edge of the blade make a noise like "shurr" as it went through the thick tweed of his jacket, and then was running for his life.

When he reached the Place de la Goutte d'Or, he realized that the boy had not followed him. Just the one, quick, upward knife-swing of the professional killer, the swing that puts the knife in under the ribs and up into the heart; and then no more. He looked down at his coat and saw that it was cut cleanly, from below the side pocket to the second button.

Six roads lead from the Place. He guessed that any of the three southern ones would serve him. He plunged into the nearest and started down it.

At first he thought the sound was a ringing in the ears. Then, when he stopped, he could hear it quite clearly. It was a fluting whistle. It came from the street ahead, or from the roof top above him. From anywhere and from everywhere. Then, breaking the silence, the sound of a lorry coughing into life.

He had delayed too long. The sound came from in front. The pursuit was ahead of him.

To his left, a gap showed in the houses, fronted by a high, boarded fence. He could reach the top. It seemed clear of nails, barbed wire, and other sharp obstacles, so he pulled himself up and dropped into the open space behind. It was some sort of builder's yard.

He picked his way between the stacks of tiles, bricks, and pipes to the wall at the far end. The coping was out of his

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reach, but there was a ladder lying under one of the sheds. He stood this up against the wall, saw that there was an asphalted courtyard within dropping distance below him, straddled the wall long enough to kick down the ladder behind him, and dropped.

He guessed from the white lines on the asphalt that he was in a school playground, surrounded on three sides by buildings. As he stood, uncertain, one of the doors ahead of him opened and thirty or forty children ran out. They were boys, some white, some coffee-coloured. When they caught sight of him, they stopped and stared.

Petrella walked up to the largest boy, and said, " I wish to see your master."

The boy gaped at him. Petrella realized that, apart from his sudden appearance in the playground, his torn coat and his black hands must call for some explanation.

" I have had an accident," he said shortly.

" Perhaps I can help? " A stout man, with gold-rimmed glasses and a thick beard, was standing in the doorway.

" Might I have a word with you? " said Petrella.

" It would seem called for," agreed the man.

" In private."

" Very well. If you will follow."

They went into a small classroom.

" I observed your entrance," said the man. " My name, by the way, is Cleroux. If you do not wish to mention yours, I will not insist. I imagine that you are in some sort of trouble."

" I'm glad," said Petrella, " that you do not ask for explanations, for there is practically nothing I could explain."

" You speak French well," said Monsieur Cleroux. " But I think you are a foreigner. English, perhaps. It is the clothes more than the accent."

" Yes, English."

" I shall ask nothing. I have my school. We have all sorts of boys, as you see. I take no part in politics."

" If I could have a quick wash," said Petrella, " and get back to the more public part of the City, I should be for ever in your debt."

" Wash, certainly," said Monsieur Cleroux. " As for the rest, you could not leave now by the front gate. It would not even be advisable for you to come to the window. From what I observe in the road, I assure you that it is so."

" I'll take your word for it," said Petrella. " Which way can I go? "

" We have an arrangement. In case of fire. You go through a window on the first floor, across the roof, and into the factory

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next door. We should only use it, you understand, in an emergency. Once you are in the factory, it should be possible for you to walk out without question—if you looked a little more presentable. There is a wash-basin next door."

While Petrella was cleaning his face and hands and combing his hair, Monsieur Cleroux stood behind him. He seemed suddenly nervous. "I wonder," he said, "it seems impertinent. But I wonder if you could help me."

"Of course."

"It is just that we have had arguments in the school—as to the proper word. Is it right, in England, to call the man who collects the tickets on a bus an inspector or a collector?"

Petrella explained, as best he could, the respective functions of a ticket inspector, a ticket collector, and a conductor. Monsieur Cleroux thanked him profusely.

Five minutes later, one hand in his side pocket to hold together the slit in the jacket, he was walking out of the Works Entrance of the Frambouillet Motor Accessories Factory. So far as he knew, his departure aroused no interest.

He strolled through three or four streets, going south, towards the centre of the town. At the first opportunity he went into a shop and bought himself a light, pastel linen sun jacket of a type much worn by young men about Paris that summer. The shopkeeper obligingly parcelled up his tweed jacket for him into a neat brown paper package. Petrella bought himself some sun glasses as well, and then, his mind more easy, strolled down the rue d'Hauteville and into the boulevard Poissonière where he picked himself a crowded café.

Most of the patrons were sitting out on the pavement under the striped awning. He went into the interior, which was nearly empty, and pleasantly cool. He settled at a table in the corner, where he could not be overlooked, took the bulky envelope from his inner pocket, and slipped the point of a table knife under the flap. For a moment, the stout manilla resisted. Then it gave with a rasping jerk, and a fold of tissue paper shot out and hit the table; and out from the folds of the tissue paper slid a little snake.

It was made of gold, and had tiny, crimson eyes. Petrella had seen snakes of a similar type before, but they had been made of larger links and were comparatively crude. This was a piece of magic, made of two or three hundred tiny interleaved plates, none of them loose, yet all of them moving freely, fitted into each other with miraculous perfection, so that the whole thin body rippled with venomous life. What it must be worth, he could not begin to imagine.

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"Pretty thing," said a voice. "Buy it for your girl?" A waiter had come up. He was a big blond boy with the look of a German.

"That's right," said Petrella. He picked up the snake by its tail and slid it back into the envelope.

"I bought mine a hairclip last week," said the waiter. "It cost me three weeks' pay. The proprietor here is a pig. He pays nothing."

Petrella ordered a *fine*, drank it down quickly, and left a tip almost large enough to buy the waiter's young lady a second hairclip.

Then he went out into the street. At the door of the café he paused for a quick look. All seemed in order. Twenty yards away, on the other side of the road, was parked an old, ivy-green Renault saloon, which had not been there when he went in. Nothing suspicious about that. Plenty of Renaults in Paris.

He crossed the road, and made for the gardens of the Palais Royal. He wanted time to think.

He was fairly clear now what had happened. He had gone to the wrong address. What he had said had been construed as a password, and he had been entrusted, by some part of the Algerian terrorist organization, with a very valuable piece of property, probably stolen, and designed to be sold for their funds.

So much was clear.

What was far less clear was what he was going to do next. He could go to the police. And tell them what? At best, be held for endless questioning. If the snake had been less valuable or less attractive, he might have pushed it down behind a seat in the Métro and left it.

In the end, he went out, bought a stamped envelope, addressed it to his great aunt, and slipped the snake into it. He added a note, asking her to place the snake in her own bank for safe keeping, and added that he had changed his plans, and was leaving for Spain that night by the ten o'clock train.

When he had posted the envelope he felt better. A good lunch at the Ruban Bleu completed the cure. In the afternoon he walked out to the Bois de Boulogne, went off the path into a clearing in the bushes, lay on his back, and went to sleep.

He was woken by a soft thud in his stomach. He came straight out of sleep and up on to his feet, ready for anything.

Standing a few paces away, staring at him, was a small girl. It was her ball which had hit him. His sudden movement had frightened the child, and she started to cry.

"There, there," said Petrella. "Do not be alarmed."

A stout lady, dressed, despite the heat of the afternoon, in a

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sealskin coat, arrived upon the scene, panting. She swept up the girl, like a baby seal, into her flippers and glowered at Petrella.

"I alarmed her, I am afraid," he said. "I woke up."

"Chérie does not cry because a man wakes up," said the lady. "What did you do to her?"

For the second time that day Petrella's discretion got the better of his valour. He walked rapidly off into the bushes, but not so rapidly that he did not hear the lady say, "There are men of a certain type who should not be allowed to enjoy their liberty."

He got back to the Place de la Concorde by early dusk, and chose himself a restaurant for his evening meal. His train went at ten. The change of plan would mean abandoning his reserved sleeper, but a night in a first-class railway carriage was not a great ordeal.

He had his baggage to collect from the Gare du Nord. If he allowed an hour, that should be ample. He ordered his meal with care and ate it with deep satisfaction.

It was while he was drinking his coffee and turning the pages of his *Paris Soir* that his eye was caught by the announcement in the Stop Press. The print was smudgy, but the meaning was clear enough.

"Just after midday today, a party of Algerian Terrorists forced a letter-box in the Boulevard Poissonière. The affair was elaborately organized. A heavy lorry was backed up to the box, a grapnel inserted, and the front of the box ripped out. The contents were collected and removed. An armed party kept watch to prevent interference. By the time the police arrived, those guilty of this outrage had taken themselves off. The precise object of this latest manœuvre of the terrorists is not known."

Petrella felt suddenly cold.

It was not the fact that the snake was now back with its original owners. This was rough justice. It was the thought that, since they had known precisely which box to open, they could never have lost sight of him for a moment.

He got up and walked to the window.

Twenty yards up the street, on the other side of the road, was parked an ivy-green Renault saloon.

Now that danger was at his elbow, Petrella's mind worked with clarity. Get hold of the police? Impossible, now, to explain why he had not handed the snake over to them at once. Get out of the restaurant and keep moving until his train left? Their organization was clearly better, far better, than he had imagined. But once he was in the street, surely he could use the cover of darkness to slip them for the few vital hours.

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He took out enough money to cover his meal, with a generous tip, and pushed it under the plate. Then he got up, purposely leaving his hat and paper in full view on the chair beside him, and strolled towards the vestibule.

"Have you a telephone?" he said to the girl behind the desk.

She pointed to the far end of the hall. He walked towards it. To the left was a side door, bolted. To the right, a flight of stairs. At the end, a telephone booth.

At the last moment, he darted to his right, up the stairs. The girl in the desk, who had evidently been watching, called out after him, but he took no notice.

At the top of the stairs a corridor presented itself, closed doors on both sides. Footsteps were coming up the stairs behind him. He picked a door on the right-hand side, and went in. It was a bedroom, unoccupied, and almost unfurnished. There was a bolt on the inside of the door, and this he shot.

The only window in the room opened on to a very narrow, flat open space, ahead of which was darkness of perhaps six feet in width, and uncertain depth. Not knowing what lay below made it curiously difficult to jump.

It was a rattling on the handle of the door which launched him. He shot upwards and outwards and landed, on hands and knees, on the roof opposite. Here the going was fairly easy. He walked cautiously to the far end, lowered himself on to a sort of pent-house which stuck out into the back alley behind the restaurant, and dropped from that to the pavement.

As he picked himself up he realized the futility of his manœuvre. His opponents were all round the building. Ten yards up the alleyway a cigarette glowed; and he heard, once again, the twittering whistle.

He turned and ran. The alley forked, and he went left at random. It was damnably dark, and in ten paces he realized that he was in a cul-de-sac. Next moment something hit him in the back, and three figures jumped at him, and he went down. He hit out blindly and went on hitting, long after he knew that it was useless.

A cloth was round his mouth, his left arm was already pinned. Strong, cruel hands were feeling for his other hand, for his nostrils, for his eyes.

Then a very bright light came on; and, with explosive suddenness, a machine pistol opened fire, the bullets thudding into the wall behind them.

Like bees unclustering from a swarm at the first whiff of smoke, his assailants left him. The last to go slid his hand down, but Petrella saw the knife and had enough strength left to wrench his

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head back out of reach. He felt the point, like the touch of a white-hot wire, slide down the back of his head, and lodge against the collar-bone with an agonizing jolt.

Then the man was gone. Petrella lay quite flat and still on the cobbles, under the bright light now centred upon him.

At no point did he completely lose consciousness. He knew that he was being picked up, none too gently. He realized that he was being placed in the car, to which the bright light was in some way attached. And when he finally opened his eyes and sat up, it was no surprise to him to find himself sprawled in a chair in the back room of a Bureau de Police.

It was a surprise, however, to find that he recognized the man who was looking down at him.

" Commissaire," he said. " Commissaire Michel, of Bordeaux."

" Formerly of Bordeaux, now of Paris. And your name is Petrella. You are, or were, a member of the British Police."

" I still am," said Petrella. " What's left of me."

" You are very lucky," said the Commissaire, " that the damage is not greater. Perhaps you would care to explain why you are tackling, single-handed and, as far as I know, unaccredited, the Algerian terrorist organization or, perhaps I should say, private army."

" I'm on holiday," said Petrella.

" I see," said the Commissaire. " A vigorous commencement to your vacation. I would suggest that you drink this—and tell us exactly what you have been up to."

Petrella drank the proffered wine thirstily; then he talked.

Commissaire Michel said, " I re-name you, The Cat. You have nine lives. How you came alive out of the rue Antoine I cannot say. Would you mind letting me see the paper on which your compatriot wrote the young lady's address? "

Petrella took out the piece of paper from his pocket and Commissaire Michel, after one glance at it, said, " It is, of course, not the rue Antoine you wanted, but the rue St. Antoine, in the Fourth Arrondissement. A very different street, in a very different type of district."

" And the snake? "

" As you suppose. A gift for the terrorist funds. It would, eventually, have been sold for its true value in the rue St. Honoré —after it had passed through three or four pairs of hands. Perhaps you gave some password. Or seeing you were alone and unarmed, in a quarter where an armed patrol will penetrate only if another armed patrol is covering it—they jumped to conclusions. A messenger to take charge of the snake was expected. You

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arrived. Therefore you *were* the messenger. A not uncommon form of reasoning."

"They'd got it back. What were they worrying about?"

"Your crime did not lie in taking the snake. It was that you could recognize the man who had given it to you."

"I see," said Petrella. "You haven't got some more of that wine, have you? By the way, how was it that you happened to be on the spot so conveniently? I haven't really thanked you for that yet."

"We observed that the organization was in pursuit of someone. Therefore we watched them. Can you use your arm?"

"I don't think there's anything broken."

"You understand that the man who used the knife was trying to blind you? To blind you, or mark the front of your face so deeply that you would be recognizable if you came to Paris again."

"No," said Petrella. "I didn't understand."

He realized that there was a lot that he did not understand, and would probably never understand about the secretive bitter warfare into the fringes of which he had trespassed.

"I have made arrangements," said the Commissaire, "for you to be taken by ambulance to the station. You will be put into a special sleeper, and two 'male nurses' will travel with you as far as the Spanish frontier."

He saw the look on Petrella's face, and began to laugh.

"Cheer up," he said. "Memories are not long. It would be well, I think, if you were to stay out of Paris for six months. You have an aged relative in Paris. I will arrange that she is informed —very discreetly."

"You won't shock *her*," said Petrella. "She's got no more nerves than a bull-terrier. What I was wondering—it's a great impertinence. But might one of your subordinates be able to take a letter to the rue St. Antoine? Mademoiselle Arture will perhaps be expecting a communication."

"Of course," said the Commissaire. "In an affair of the heart, no effort must be spared."

It was two weeks later and Petrella was lying back in a long wicker chair on the verandah of the Villa Hernandez, listening to the cracked bell of the monastery on the hill, and waiting for his evening drink. When the man brought it to him, there was a letter beside it on the tray. And the envelope bore a French stamp.

It was from Commissaire Michel. It concluded, "So I dispatched one of my own men, Agent Crozier, to the rue St. Antoine. I should judge that Mademoiselle Arture is a young

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lady of uncommon attractions since Crozier has repeated his visit three times in the past week. I should suggest that perhaps your friend should visit Paris in person, or he may find that Mademoiselle Natalie prefers a French policeman in the flesh to an English one on paper."

He was still laughing when his father stepped on to the verandah.

"Paris is such a wonderful place," he said.

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STATIONARY?

Whether your station is humble or high, if you are sitting on the platform and your holiday express is twenty minutes overdue, don't rail at the railways but train your brain. Inquire, if in doubt, not at the Stationmaster's Office, but at page 143

1. *What is a wayzgoose, and how is it connected with August 24?*
2. *When were felt hats invented?*
3. *Can you identify these Forces phrases: i. Creeping and weeping; ii. Pusser's issue; iii. Horse's neck; iv. a Spithead pheasant.*
4. *In what games are these expressions used:*
   i. misère;
   ii. chukka;
   iii. crosse;
   iv. a Telemark turn;
   v. a shuttlecock.
5. *Hiking in the woods you see: a Red Admiral; a Green Man; a Yellowhammer; and a Bloody Cranesbill. Would you identify these as human, furred, feathered, botanical, or mineral?*
6. *Which is which:*
   Numismatics—study of coins or the Great Pyramid?
   Morphology—drug-addiction or biological study?
   Conchology—lore of child-medicine or seashells?
7. *Did Sarah Bernhardt ever take part in a film?*
8. *How's your knowledge of heraldry? Can you identify:*
   i. a Lozenge;
   ii. a Mond;
   iii. a Wyvern. And what does Undy mean?
9. *When was the opening of the Twopenny Tube? Where was it?*

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Sound and swell of the sea—a hint of danger—a boy who proves himself at a man's job. This story of young Phil and Zenas Craig, skipper of the Adventurer, is an Argosy first by Anne H. Bailey and Edward R. Knowlton:

HARPOON

AT the end of thirty-seven minutes, the big bluefin tuna was half on its side, each weary circle bringing it closer to *Adventurer*'s sleek freeboard. Philip felt a curious sympathy for the fish in its losing battle against the will of the man in the swivel fishing-chair. It was still hard for him to think of this man as his father. When Rock Judman spoke without turning, Philip jumped.

"He's about done, Phil. Get ready with the gaff."

"The—the gaff?"

Skilfully, Rock gained another yard of line on the big reel. "Yes, the gaff. We're here to catch fish, aren't we?"

Philip glanced forward, puzzled. Old Zenas Craig, owner-skipper of *Adventurer* out of Gloucester, left the wheel and moved aft. In Craig's big-knuckled hand was a short wooden shaft with the sharp, iron gaff-hook seized on to it with marline.

To the formidable shoulders in the fishing-chair Craig said calmly, "I'd better handle the gaff, Mr. Judman. A bit tricky, fetchin' a big fellow like that one—especially on a lad's first trip."

Still without turning, Rock said, "Not on your life! A boy of mine, sixteen years old, and never gaffed a big fish! Give him the hook, Craig. Good heavens, I took my first one when I was twelve."

Craig said quietly, "But you'd been afloat most of your life—"

Rock Judman swivelled round. He shot a quick, shrewd glance at the older man. In that brief turn, Philip sensed the drive that lay behind that look—it was there for anyone to see. The square jaw, the level, commanding gaze that had enabled this man in the past three years to lay down airfields along the North African coast—to boss other men—to get a job done so that he could come home and take his son fishing. This man who had said as long ago as Philip could remember, "It's simple.

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Just make up your mind to win, never to lose. Nothing to it."

But how could anyone be sure of winning when his stomach was knotted with fear that, in front of the one man whose opinion counted, he might fail?

"Give the boy the gaff," Rock repeated. "Let him see what it is to do a man's job in a man's sport."

Under the long-peaked fisherman's cap, Craig's eyes were bleak. He held the gaff out. "I'll handle the leader, son. Just slip it in easily under the gills."

Working the immense fish expertly toward the boat, Philip's father got out of the chair and moved to the gunwale. At Philip's left, Craig was pulling on a pair of white work gloves to keep the leader from slicing his hands.

Between them, the gaff handle growing slippery from his own sweat, Philip waited.

"Next time round," Rock said under his breath. "What a fish! What a hell of a fish!"

Philip wiped first one sweaty hand and then the other against his trousers.

Everything, he thought, since his father's return, had been leading to this moment. A man—or a boy? That was how Rock Judman was looking at it.

Philip pushed forward against the weatherboard. The streamlined bulk of the great fish circled closer.

"Easy, boy, easy does it. Don't ram at him."

That was Craig, one gloved hand stealing out to curl round the leader.

"Now!" Rock snapped. "Let him have it!"

Philip lowered the hook. At its motion the fish flinched, seemed about to gather strength. Desperate lest it escape, Philip lunged the gaff wildly towards the blood-red, flaring gills. The lunge, the inexpert, anxious jabbing of the hook were his mistake.

Goaded, the bluefin exploded into wild action. There was a swirling splash, a drenching of terror-whipped water, the column of the tail rising in front of Philip. And then the thing Philip alone felt: the slipping away of the gaff handle through his wet palms. In a dull, metallic arc the hook flipped free from the raw groove in the tuna's jaw, and Craig swore softly as the leader went slack in his hands.

Then there was only the shadow of the great fish, stirring slowly to freedom, sliding by the transom. That and the foolish-looking gaff handle held upright by the iron on its end, bobbing like a Jack-in-the-box in the cold sea.

On rigid arms Philip braced himself across the weatherboard,

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head over the sea, and was sick with the sickness of failure. He waited for the bite of his father's words.

When the words did not come, Philip turned. Craig stood there alone, steadying Rock Judman's rod against the slow surge of the boat.

"Gone forrad," Craig said. "Down below."

"I—I—"

"Ain't no sense tryin' to say nothin', lad. Some men take things hard. Seems as though there's got to be a first time for everythin'."

Turning, Philip fled from the pity in those weathered eyes. He found his way round the canopy stanchions and the windshield to the high, flush foredeck. He lay down on the hot canvas decking and pillowed his face on his arms.

Below him, he felt *Adventurer* come to life as Craig got under way. Yesterday, when he had felt it for the first time, the motion of a free boat had thrilled him. He remembered standing up here on the foredeck with Craig.

He remembered Craig explaining how the stubby little pulpit built out from *Adventurer*'s stem was designed to hold a man firmly, to give him a clear shot with a harpoon at the tuna below. How, once the long deadly lance was plunged home, the lily-iron at its tip would come loose and stay buried in the fish to hold the keg line. And how the keg, now standing on the deck beside the harpoon, would be snatched overboard by the speared fish and towed until the tuna was too tired to tow it any longer.

He had even pictured himself driving the harpoon home while Rock Judman stood by admiringly.

Now? Now, as he rolled away so that he could no longer see the harpoon or the keg, he hated the sea with a sudden, passionate hatred.

He hadn't noticed the ventilator Craig had run through the foredeck until through it, like a speaking-tube, he heard his father's voice.

"All right, all right, Craig," Rock was saying, "but what the devil! A full day and a half I fish without a strike. Then the biggest fish I ever hooked—and what happens?"

As always, Craig's voice was quiet, "Seems as if you plumb asked for it, Mr. Judman. Handlin' a fish that size takes more than just wantin' to."

"But dammit, Craig, it didn't look to me as if the kid *did* want to. You practically had to force him to take the gaff. Why, at his age nothing could have kept me from a chance like that." Rock paused, then continued in a lower tone, "I'd hate to think my son hadn't the nerve—"

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Abruptly Craig cut in, " The lad tried, didn't he? "

" Well, yes. Yes, he tried."

" So? "

" So I over-rated him, is that it? Maybe I asked too much too soon? "

There was a pause before Craig said, " I didn't say that. But I will say a man that's got a habit of bein' right gets a bit out of patience—even with honest mistakes."

Philip heard his father grunt. " You're a shrewd old devil, Craig. All right, you tell me. How would you handle the boy? "

" Well, askin' the kid to take on such a job for the first time, an' then walkin' out on him when he gets a bit over-eager maybe ain't the best way of buildin' up his confidence—with him fresh out of a farmyard in the hills."

Philip moved away from the ventilator. It wasn't enough to foul up the gaffing of the fish. Now old Craig had to fight his battles for him. And to think he'd actually looked forward to being out at sea instead of in the house on the quiet hillside overlooking the lake where he and his mother had waited for Rock Judman's return.

He realized now why she had said to him one evening as they put out suet and seeds for the wild birds, " Your father thinks I'm an old softie, son—wasting money on bird seed. But he doesn't like to be reminded of the time he sat up almost all one night holding a Scarlet Tanager in his hands."

" All night? " Philip had asked in amazement.

" Yes. The bird had broken its leg somehow. Your father made some tiny splints and set it. Then he held the little thing in his hands nearly all night long to keep it from hurting itself."

His mother had turned then, and put her hands on Philip's shoulders. " You think he's hard, Philip. And he is. He has to be, to get his job done. But he's fair, too. Absolutely fair—and strong—and very proud. Most of all, he wants to be proud of his son."

That, Philip saw now, had been her way of trying to prepare him.

He was yanked back to the present by the sound of Rock's voice, this time from the cockpit. " Phil, mind coming down here a second? "

When they faced one another Rock said in his clipped, dour way, " Let's forget it, son. Maybe I was wrong to expect so much." Angrily, Philip thought, Those aren't his words. Those are Craig's words.

" Well? " Rock probed.

" All right," Philip said.

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Rock's eyes narrowed briefly, questioned Philip's gaze for an instant, swung away, then back.

"Look," he said, "it's hotter than the devil. What do you say—let's go for a swim. Do us both good."

"Swim—out here?" Apprehensively Philip glanced at the slowly-heaving ocean.

"Why, sure. You can swim, can't you?"

Philip dragged his gaze back to meet his father's. How could anyone hope to make Rock Judman see the difference between swimming in the little lake at home and this vast sullen grey sea around them?

"Well, can you swim?"

There was no sense in trying to explain. "Yes," Philip said, "of course I can swim."

"Then—" Rock bit his words off, moved close. "Good lord, I think you're afraid!"

This, Philip thought, is how the tuna must have felt. This is why I felt sorry for the tuna. This is why it exploded when it felt the gaff. His anger boiled into a bitter, reckless rage. He snatched at his shirt, dragged it off over his head.

"O.K.," he cried, "we'll swim. Last one in's a dope!" On the final word his voice broke, scaling into a falsetto. He plunged toward the gunwale only to find Craig blocking him.

Craig said, "No swimmin'. That's an order. Sharks this far out in the bay."

Rock pushed his way between them. "Sharks—hell! I've kicked sharks out of my way all over the world."

Craig was immovable. "That's as may be," he said, "but no swimmin'. If one of you got into trouble it would be my responsibility. When I'm hired out to a party, part of the contract is to keep 'em from makin' damn fools of themselves. Even if I could swim myself—which I can't—the order stands."

Rock's face flared crimson. "Why, I've half a mind—"

"Seems like that's all you've got, right now," Craig cut in. "Especially when you waste time bulldozin' a boy when the bay's fairly crawlin' with bluefins!"

"Tuna—where?"

Calmly, Craig pointed. "Yonder, where they usually are—in the water. Want me to rig your rod—and the boy's?"

When he faced Craig again Rock's gaze was as it had been earlier, in the chair—level, commanding. He did not glance towards Philip.

He said, "Make Phil's ready, if you want. I'm going to take a crack at them with the harpoon—if it's rigged."

No second chance, Philip thought. This time his father would

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make sure there were no mistakes. A man who had built airfields, and had had his own way all over the world, couldn't tolerate mistakes. Or excuses. In his world, a man was a man.

As Rock swung himself round the canopy stanchions on to the high foredeck, Craig turned to face Philip.

"Want me to rig your rod, son?"

It was the pity in Craig's eyes again that did it.

"No!" Philip burst out. "No, I don't want you to rig my rod. I don't want you to do anything but let me alone. Both of you! I'll stay back here. I'll keep quiet and out of the way so I won't foul up anything else. Just let me alone!"

Craig sucked in his leathery cheeks. He glanced forward to Rock, already poised in the pulpit, the long shaft of the harpoon balanced across the half barrel hoop he leaned against, waist high.

Perhaps three hundred yards ahead, the fins of the tuna did a graceful ballet dance through the wind-scuffs on the water. Then he faced Philip again.

"Somebody's got to handle the boat," he said. "Stickin' the harpoon into a fish means a man's got to be where he can stick him."

"What's that got to do with me?"

Craig cocked an eyebrow. "Just that if you'll simmer down a bit I'll be obliged if you'll steer the boat. Me, I'll go up forrad and signal your pa on to the fish. Ticklish, it is, now'n again." He paused, smiled a little. "He ain't in no mood for foolin' around. And good harpoon gear costs money."

"It's a wonder," Philip said, "you'd trust *Adventurer* to me."

"She's right friendly. She'll work along with you." Craig motioned Philip to the wheel and indicated the throttle quadrant. "Just ease her. Put her over, gentle-like, either way I signal. Got it?"

"If you say so," Philip replied glumly, and took the wheel while Craig hooked back the section of the windshield directly in front of the wheel. Even with the heat of the day, the air felt cool on Philip's bare torso. And Craig's hand, light on Philip's shoulder, felt hard and strong.

"Remember, son, everybody makes a mistake now and again."

Philip laughed shortly. He nodded toward his father.

"Him?"

"Maybe that's for you to show him," Craig said, and swung himself on to the foredeck.

The trouble was, Philip told himself, Craig was wrong. Everyone didn't make a mistake. Not if his name was Rock Judman.

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Philip settled down at the wheel. He watched Craig take the keg from its position well down the deck. Craig moved it forward and set it on the right-hand curve of the bow, just aft of the inner end of the pulpit. He cleared the keg line carefully so that it ran free to the lily-iron at the tip of the harpoon in Rock's hands. Philip assumed Craig made the move so that when a fish was speared the keg line, whipping out, would snatch the keg overside on Rock's right, endangering no one. Philip was sure when he saw Craig move to the left and stand just aft of the pulpit.

The light breeze carried Craig's words back to Philip.

" When you strike, clear your line to starboard, Mr. Judman."

Rock turned with a start. " What are you doing here? Who's handling the boat? "

" The lad," Craig said. " I'll do the signallin'. You 'tend to the fish."

Rock glanced swiftly aft. " Think he can manage? "

" Just one way to find out, ain't there? "

Rock started to turn away. Philip was sure he didn't intend his words to carry. " I'll bet he can, at that."

It wasn't much, Philip thought, but he still had a chance.

A moment later the Captain's hand reached behind him warily, with a slow, downward motion. Philip nudged the throttle back a notch and felt a sudden sensation of power as *Adventurer* answered his move and settled down for the stalk. He could see the school easily now, rolling effortlessly eastward.

A little to the right . . . *starboard*, he must learn to say . . . a little to port . . . steady, steady as she goes . . . back another notch on the throttle . . . the trailing edge of the school only a few feet away . . .

Rock raised the harpoon in his big hands, bent forward. Craig signalled for idling speed. The long shaft was a diagonal slash against the sky. Then, disgustedly, Rock lowered the harpoon.

" Damn fish dived—just at the last moment." His voice was edged with irritation—as if, Philip thought, the fish had insulted him personally.

Unflustered, Craig signalled for more power, and the hunt went on. Three times they moved up on their targets. And three times, at the last possible instant, Rock swore and lowered the harpoon.

The last time, Rock called back to Philip, " Damn it, Phil, take it easier. You're over-running them."

Craig said quietly, " He's doin' all right. The fish are skittish, that's all."

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Philip's earlier feeling of hope was destroyed with his father's words. If they missed now, no matter what Craig said, Rock would see it as his son's fault, not his own over-eagerness, or the disposition of the fish, or anything else. Those three vain chases had changed it from sport to a personal feud between Rock and the fish—a battle that Rock would win, because Rock Judman always won.

Rock Judman never made a mistake.

They were on the fourth fish now. Gently, with ever-increasing skill that brought a satisfied nod from Craig, Philip eased *Adventurer* up for the strike. This time, there must be no false move of any kind. Rock's angry determination was plain in every line of his big body as he raised the harpoon. He had been crossed enough.

Craig stopped signalling. Instinctively, Philip yanked the clutch bar into neutral, leaving *Adventurer* all but dead in the water. It was up to Rock and the tuna now.

Philip could only guess how it happened. His guess was that the tuna cut sharply in under the pulpit, crossing to his father's left. Probably, too, the fish began to plunge.

Rock's move was plain enough. It was the move of a man thwarted once too often. Arms still high, he whirled to his left. The keg line dropped safely behind him, but trailed across the deck in front of Craig. Then, abandoning caution, Rock plunged the harpoon downwards.

" Not this time, damn you! " he cried.

But Philip wasn't watching Rock any longer. He was watching Craig, trapped by the keg line. Craig, the man who had admitted he couldn't swim, doing a desperate manœuvre to avoid the whipping keg line. He might have made it if the keg itself, yanked across the deck, hadn't caught him full and fair behind the knees. His scream was a tatter of sound, shredded by terror as he fell.

In the instant it took him to cross the cockpit and take off in a flat dive towards the hated water beneath him, one thought was clear in Philip's mind. Rock Judman had made a mistake. A mistake that could cost not a fish, but a man's life.

The water smacked him in the face. The cold of it squeezed the air from his lungs. The taste of it was sharp and strange in his mouth. And the fear of it and the things it contained was brilliant in his mind.

He got his head up. He thought he saw the keg disappearing. But it wasn't the keg. It was Craig's head, and Craig was trying to shout but succeeded only in spluttering as he disappeared.

Three driving strokes took Philip to the spot. He kicked

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over in a surface dive. The salt stung his eyes, but he kept them open, peering down into the strange and terrifying translucency. A shadowy form was going away from him into blackness. He pulled himself towards it, reached, found a handhold, and pedalled his way to the surface.

Instantly, when he broke the surface, Craig's stringy arm was round his neck. He fought it, managed to get an elbow under it, and force it away. He gulped the blessed taste of fresh air.

" Easy, Cap'n. Lie back."

But there was no understanding in those terror-widened eyes.

The arm snaked out again. Something hardened in Philip. He heard his own voice bark—it must have been his own, but it sounded like Rock's. " Damn it, man—relax! "

The snap of command, if not the words, got through. Craig let himself be turned on to his back, let Philip's arm across his chest hold his face clear of the water.

Philip was on his back, trying to see *Adventurer*, when the thing rubbed against his legs. Terrified, he drew them up. Out of the corner of his eye he could see something bearing down on him. Craig had warned them against sharks. He ducked his head to one side as the object came closer. Then the keg, drawn by the keg line attached to hundreds of pounds of maddened tuna below, boiled by. Philip laughed in sheer relief as he realized it was the line that had rubbed against his legs—and got a mouthful of water for his pains.

Not until then did he wonder about Rock. Had he, too, gone overboard after Craig and left all three of them without a boat?

He managed to get his head up. The keg was still going away. Beyond it, *Adventurer* was just completing a tight turn to bear down on them.

He felt Craig try to move. He said gently, " Easy, Cap'n. Rock's coming."

Slowly *Adventurer* slid alongside. Rock's big hands lifted Craig like a child. They came back and grabbed Philip's arms with the strength of steel.

When Philip gained his feet and shook the hair from his eyes, he saw Craig slumped on the engine box next to the heat of the dry exhaust running vertically up through the canopy roof.

" C-cold," Craig was saying. " C-colder'n charity! "

Rock bent over the old man. He put an arm round his thin shoulders, then began to unbutton his shirt.

Standing behind his father, Philip watched the gentleness of those big hands. Funny. For the first time, he believed his mother's story about Rock and the bird with the broken leg.

He tried to think out how to say all the things that should be

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said. And there was no good way to begin. Perhaps this was why Rock had simply walked off, and gone below after the loss of the fish. Perhaps he knew that words—any words—were no good at a time when a man had made a bad mistake.

Philip turned and started for the foc'sle companionway. He'd have to take time to think. That was certain. He was almost at the companionway when Rock turned, one arm supporting Craig.

"Phil?"

"Yes, Dad?"

"In my bag, down below, there's a bottle. Mind getting it? Oh—and a blanket for the skipper, here."

"To hell with the blanket," Craig said. "G-get the bottle."

The bottle was rum—blood-red, heavy rum. Rock took it when Philip brought it up. He worked the cork loose and held the bottle out towards Craig.

"Cussing rum, I call it," Rock said. "Reserved for helping a man cuss himself out when he's made a damn fool of himself."

Straight-faced, but eyes twinkling, Craig took the bottle. "Hanged if I won't drink to that, Judman," he said.

"Who's got a better right?" Rock said, and waited while Craig drank.

"I can name one," Craig said, wiping his lips and passing the liquor back to Rock.

Bottle in hand, Rock turned to face Philip. "So can I," he said. "How about it, Phil?"

Gingerly, Philip put the bottle to his lips. The liquor, in spite of his care, was liquid fire in his throat. It brought tears to his eyes, but he didn't cough or splutter. He lowered the bottle and wiped his eyes. And then he was glad he had the liquor to blame, because it would be the very devil if Rock Judman, with that big, warm smile on his face, had known his son was more than half crying—a lot more like a boy than a man.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on Page 144

Across. 1, *Bishop*. 5, *Trysts*. 9, *Deprave*. 10, *Spurns*. 12, *Room to swing a cat*. 13, *Fair*. 14, *Half-sister*. 18, *Rigging out*. 19, *Ha-ha*. 21, *Under the weather*. 24, *Surrey*. 25, *Nemesis*. 26, *Peahen*. 27, *Stress*.

Down. 2, *Improving*. 3, *Health*. 4, *Press-gang*. 5, *Tosti*. 6, *Young rip*. 7, *Tonic*. 8, *Odoriferous*. 11, *Start afresh*. 15, *Four winds*. 16, *Tea-chests*. 17, *Hierarch*. 20, *Palmer*. 22, *Drupe*. 23, *Haydn*.

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SONATA FOR HARP AND BICYCLE

He had been in Grimes Buildings —after dark

BY JOAN AIKEN

"NO one is allowed to remain in the building after five o'clock," Mr. Manaby told his new assistant, showing him into the little room that was like the inside of a parcel.

"Why not?"

"Directorial policy," said Mr. Manaby. But that was not the real reason.

Gaunt and sooty, Grimes Buildings lurched up the side of a hill towards Clerkenwell. Every little office within its dim and crumbling exterior owned one tiny crumb of light—such was the proud boast of the architect—but towards evening the crumbs were collected as by an immense vacuum cleaner, absorbed and demolished, yielding to an uncontrollable mass of dark that came tumbling in through windows and doors to take their place. Darkness infested the building like a flight of bats returning willingly to roost.

"Wash hands, please. Wash hands, please," the intercom began to bawl in the passages at a quarter to five. Without much need of prompting the staff hustled like lemmings along the corridors to green- and blue-tiled washrooms that mocked with an illusion of cheerfulness the encroaching dusk.

"All papers into cases, please," the Tannoy warned, five minutes later. "Look at your desks, ladies and gentlemen. Any documents left lying about? Kindly put them away. Desks must be left clear and tidy. Drawers must be shut."

A multitudinous shuffling, a rustling as of innumerable bluebottles might have been heard by the attentive ear after this injunction, as the employees of Moreton Wold and Company thrust their papers into cases, hurried letters and invoices into drawers, clipped statistical abstracts together and slammed them into filing-cabinets, dropped discarded copy into wastepaper baskets. Two minutes later, and not a desk throughout Grimes Buildings bore more than its customary coating of dust.

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"Hats and coats on, please. Hats and coats on, please. Did you bring an umbrella? Have you left any shopping on the floor?" At three minutes to five the homegoing throng was in the lifts and on the stairs; a clattering, staccato-voiced flood darkened momentarily the great double doors of the building, and then as the first faint notes of St. Paul's came echoing faintly on the frosty air, to be picked up near at hand by the louder chimes of St. Biddulph's-on-the-Wall, the entire premises of Moreton Wold stood empty.

"But why is it?" Jason Ashgrove, the new copywriter, asked his secretary one day. "Why are the staff herded out so fast? Not that I'm against it, mind you; I think it's an admirable idea in many ways, but there is the liberty of the individual to be considered, don't you think?"

"Hush!" Miss Golden, the secretary, gazed at him with large and terrified eyes. "You mustn't ask that sort of question. When you are taken on to the Established Staff you'll be told. Not before."

"But I want to know *now*," Jason said in discontent. "Do you know?"

"Yes, I do," Miss Golden answered tantalizingly. "Come on, or we shan't have finished the Oat Crisp layout by a quarter to." And she stared firmly down at the copy in front of her, lips folded, candyfloss hair falling over her face, lashes hiding eyes like peridots, a girl with a secret.

Jason was annoyed. He rapped out a couple of rude and witty rhymes which Miss Golden let pass in a withering silence.

"What do you want for your birthday, Miss Golden? Sherry? Fudge? Bath cubes?"

"I want to go away with a clear conscience about Oat Crisps," Miss Golden retorted. It was not true; what she chiefly wanted was Mr. Jason Ashgrove, but he had not realized this yet.

"Come on, don't tease! I'm sure you haven't been on the Established Staff all that long," he coaxed her. "What happens when one is taken on, anyway? Does the Managing Director have us up for a confidential chat? Or are we given a little book called *The Awful Secret of Grimes Buildings*?"

Miss Golden wasn't telling. She opened her drawer and took out a white towel and a cake of rosy soap.

"Wash hands, please! Wash hands, please!"

Jason was frustrated. "You'll be sorry," he said. "I shall do something desperate."

"Oh no, you mustn't!" Her eyes were large with fright. She ran from the room and was back within a couple of moments, still drying her hands.

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"If I took you out for a coffee, couldn't you give me just a tiny hint?"

Side by side Miss Golden and Mr. Ashgrove ran along the green-floored passages, battled down the white marble stairs among the hundred other employees from the tenth floor, the nine hundred from the floors below.

He saw her lips move as she said something, but in the clatter of two thousand feet the words were lost.

"—fire-escape," he heard, as they came into the momentary hush of the coir-carpeted entrance hall. And "—it's to do with a bicycle. A bicycle and a harp."

"I don't understand."

Now they were in the street, chilly with the winter-dusk smells of celery on barrows, of swept-up leaves heaped in faraway parks, and cold layers of dew sinking among the withered evening primroses in the bombed areas. London lay about them wreathed in twilit mystery and fading against the barred and smoky sky. Like a ninth wave the sound of traffic overtook and swallowed them.

"Please tell me!"

But, shaking her head, she stepped on to a scarlet homebound bus and was borne away from him.

Jason stood undecided on the pavement, with the crowds dividing round him as round the pier of a bridge. He scratched his head, looked about him for guidance.

An ambulance clanged, a taxi hooted, a drill stuttered, a siren wailed on the river, a door slammed, a brake squealed, and close beside his ear a bicycle bell tinkled its tiny warning.

A bicycle, she had said. A bicycle and a harp.

Jason turned and stared at Grimes Buildings.

Somewhere, he knew, there was a back way in, a service entrance. He walked slowly past the main doors, with their tubs of snowy chrysanthemums, and up Glass Street. A tiny furtive wedge of darkness beckoned him, a snicket, a hacket, an alley carved into the thickness of the building. It was so narrow that at any moment, it seemed, the overtopping walls would come together and squeeze it out of existence.

Walking as softly as an Indian, Jason passed through it, slid by a file of dustbins, and found the foot of the fire-escape. Iron treads rose into the mist, like an illustration to a Gothic fairy tale.

He began to climb.

When he had mounted to the ninth storey he paused for breath. It was a lonely place. The lighting consisted of a dim bulb at

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the foot of every flight. A well of gloom sank beneath him. The cold fingers of the wind nagged and fluttered at the skirts of his jacket and he pulled the string of the fire-door and edged inside.

Grimes Buildings were triangular, with the street forming the base of the triangle, and the fire-escape the point. Jason could see two long passages coming towards him, meeting at an acute angle where he stood. He started down the left-hand one, tip-toeing in the cave-like silence. Nowhere was there any sound, except for the faraway drip of a tap. No night watchman would stay in the building; none was needed. Burglars gave the place a wide berth.

Jason opened a door at random; then another. Offices lay everywhere about him, empty and forbidding. Some held lipstick-stained tissues, spilt powder, and orange-peel; others were still foggy with cigarette smoke. Here was a Director's suite of rooms—a desk like half an acre of frozen lake, inch-thick carpet, roses, and the smell of cigars. Here was a conference room with scattered squares of doodled blotting-paper. All equally empty.

He was not sure when he first began to notice the bell. Telephone, he thought at first, and then he remembered that all the outside lines were disconnected at five. And this bell, anyway, had not the regularity of a telephone's double ring: there was a tinkle, and then silence; a long ring, and then silence; a whole volley of rings together, and then silence.

Jason stood listening, and fear knocked against his ribs and shortened his breath. He knew that he must move or be paralysed by it. He ran up a flight of stairs and found himself with two more endless green corridors beckoning him like a pair of dividers.

Another sound now: a waft of ice-thin notes, riffling up an arpeggio like a flurry of snowflakes. Far away down the passage it echoed. Jason ran in pursuit, but as he ran the music receded. He circled the building, but it always outdistanced him, and when he came back to the stairs he heard it fading away to the storey below.

He hesitated, and as he did so heard again the bell; the bicycle bell. It was approaching him fast, bearing down on him, urgent, menacing. He could hear the pedals, almost see the shimmer of an invisible wheel. Absurdly, he was reminded of the insistent clamour of an ice-cream vendor, summoning children on a sultry Sunday afternoon.

There was a little fireman's alcove beside him, with buckets and pumps. He hurled himself into it. The bell stopped beside him,

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and then there was a moment while his heart tried to shake itself loose in his chest. He was looking into two eyes carved out of expressionless air; he was held by two hands knotted together out of the width of dark.

"Daisy, Daisy?" came the whisper. "Is that you, Daisy? Have you come to give me your answer?"

Jason tried to speak, but no words came.

"It's not Daisy! Who are *you*?" The sibilants were full of threat. "You can't stay here. This is private property."

He was thrust along the corridor. It was like being pushed by a whirlwind—the fire door opened ahead of him without a touch, and he was on the openwork platform, clutching the slender railing. Still the hands would not let him go.

"How about it?" the whisper mocked him. "How about jumping? It's an easy death compared with some."

Jason looked down into the smoky void. The darkness nodded to him like a familiar.

"You wouldn't be much loss, would you? What have you got to live for?"

Miss Golden, Jason thought. She would miss me. And the syllables Berenice Golden lingered in the air like a chime. Drawing on some unknown deposit of courage he shook himself loose from the holding hands and ran down the fire-escape without looking back.

Next morning when Miss Golden, crisp, fragrant, and punctual, shut the door of Room 492 behind her, she stopped short of the hat-pegs with a horrified gasp.

"Mr. Ashgrove, your hair!"

"It makes me look more distinguished, don't you think?" he said.

It had indeed this effect, for his impeccable dark cut had turned to a stippled silver which might have been envied by many a diplomat.

"How did it happen? You've not—" her voice sank to a whisper—"*you've not been in Grimes Buildings after dark?*"

"Miss Golden—Berenice," he said earnestly. "Who was Daisy? Plainly you know. Tell me the story."

"Did you see him?" she asked faintly.

"Him?"

"William Heron—The Wailing Watchman. Oh," she exclaimed in terror, "I can see you did. Then you are doomed—doomed!"

"If I'm doomed," said Jason, "let's have coffee and you tell me the story quickly."

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" It all happened over fifty years ago," said Berenice, as she spooned out coffee powder with distracted extravagance. "Heron was the night watchman in this building, patrolling the corridors from dusk to dawn every night on his bicycle. He fell in love with a Miss Bell who taught the harp. She rented a room—this room—and gave lessons in it. She began to reciprocate his love, and they used to share a picnic supper every night at eleven, and she'd stay on a while to keep him company. It was an idyll, among the fire-buckets and the furnace-pipes.

" On Hallowe'en he had summoned up the courage to propose to her. The day before he had told her he was going to ask her a very important question, and he came to the Buildings with a huge bunch of roses and a bottle of wine. But Miss Bell never turned up.

" The explanation was simple. Miss Bell, of course, had been losing a lot of sleep through her nocturnal romance, and so she used to take a nap in her music-room between seven and ten, to save going home. In order to make sure that she would wake up she persuaded her father, a distant relative of Graham Bell, to attach an alarm-waking fixture to her telephone which called her every night at ten. She was too modest and shy to let Heron know that she spent those hours in the building, and to give him the pleasure of waking her himself.

" Alas! On this important evening the line failed and she never woke up. The telephone was in its infancy at that time, you must remember.

" Heron waited and waited. At last, mad with grief and jealousy, having called her home and discovered that she was not there, he concluded that she had betrayed him, ran to the fire-escape, and cast himself off it, holding the roses and the bottle of wine.

" Daisy did not long survive him but pined away soon after. Since that day their ghosts have haunted Grimes Buildings, he vainly patrolling the corridors on his bicycle, she playing her harp in the room she rented. *But they never meet.* And anyone who meets the ghost of William Heron will himself, within five days, leap down from the same fatal fire-escape."

She gazed at him with tragic eyes.

" In that case we must lose no time," said Jason, and he enveloped her in an embrace as prompt as it was ardent. Looking down at the gossamer hair sprayed across his pin-stripe, he added, " Just the same it is a preposterous situation. Firstly, I have no intention of jumping off the fire-escape "—here, however, he repressed a shudder as he remembered the cold, clutching hands of the evening before—" and secondly, I find it quite

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nonsensical that those two inefficient ghosts have spent fifty years in this building without coming across each other. We must remedy the matter, Berenice. We must not begrudge our newfound happiness to others."

He gave her another kiss so impassioned that the electric typewriter against which they were leaning began chattering to itself in a frenzy of enthusiasm.

"This very evening," he went on, looking at his watch, "we will put matters right for that unhappy couple and then, if I really have only five more days to live, which I don't for one moment believe, we will proceed to spend them together, my bewitching Berenice, in the most advantageous manner possible."

She nodded, spellbound.

"Can you work a switchboard?" he added. She nodded again. "My love, you are perfection itself. Meet me in the switchboard room then, at ten this evening. I would say, have dinner with me, but I shall need to make one or two purchases and see an old R.A.F. friend. You will be safe from Heron's curse in the switchboard room if he always keeps to the corridors."

"I would rather meet him and die with you," she murmured.

"My angel, I hope that won't be necessary. Now," he said, sighing, "I suppose we should get down to our day's work." Strangely enough the copy they wrote that day, although engendered from such agitated minds, sold more packets of Oat Crisps than any other advertising matter before or since.

That evening when Jason entered Grimes Buildings he was carrying two bottles of wine, two bunches of red roses, and a large canvas-covered bundle. Miss Golden, who had concealed herself in the telephone exchange before the offices closed for the night, eyed these things with surprise.

"Now," said Jason, after he had greeted her. "I want you first to ring our own extension."

"No one will reply, surely?"

"I think *she* will reply."

Sure enough, when Berenice rang Extension 170 a faint, sleepy voice, distant and yet clear, whispered, "Hullo?"

"Is that Miss Bell?"

"Yes."

Berenice went a little pale. Her eyes sought Jason's and, prompted by him, she said formally, "Switchboard here, Miss Bell. Your ten o'clock call."

"Thank you," the faint voice said. There was a click and the line went blank.

"Excellent," Jason remarked. He unfastened his package and

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slipped its straps over his shoulders. "Now plug in to the intercom."

Berenice did so, and then said, loudly and clearly, "Attention. Night watchman on duty, please. Night watchman on duty. You have an urgent summons to Room 492. You have an urgent summons to Room 492." The Tannoy echoed and reverberated through the empty corridors, then coughed itself to silence.

"Now we must run. You take the roses, sweetheart, and I'll carry the bottles."

Together they raced up eight flights of stairs and along the passages to Room 492. As they neared the door a burst of music met them—harp music swelling out, sweet and triumphant. Jason took a bunch of roses from Berenice, opened the door a little way, and gently deposited them, with a bottle, inside the door. As he closed it again Berenice said breathlessly, "Did you see anyone?"

"No," he said. "The room was too full of music." She saw that his eyes were shining.

They stood hand in hand, reluctant to move away, waiting for they hardly knew what. Suddenly the door opened again. Neither Berenice nor Jason, afterwards, would speak of what they saw but each was left with a memory, bright as the picture on a Salvador Dali calendar, of a bicycle bearing on its saddle a harp, a bottle of wine, and a bouquet of red roses, sweeping improbably down the corridor and far, far away.

"We can go now," Jason said.

He led Berenice to the fire door, tucking the bottle of Médoc in his jacket pocket. A black wind from the north whistled beneath them as they stood on the openwork platform, looking down.

"We don't want our evening to be spoilt by the thought of a curse hanging over us," he said, "so this is the practical thing to do. Hang on to the roses." And holding his love firmly, Jason pulled the rip-cord of his R.A.F. friend's parachute and leapt off the fire-escape.

A bridal shower of rose-petals adorned the descent of Miss Golden, who was possibly the only girl to be kissed in mid air in the district of Clerkenwell at ten minutes to midnight on Hallowe'en.

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VERSATILE?

I like a man with poetry in him, but not a poet.

MARILYN MONROE

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MALAGUENA

Against the glow of the fire—
the fluttering movement of the woman dancing

BY A. J. LANE

THEY went that evening to the shack at the end of town and had their usual coffee and a sandwich. They ate like wolves, with Dulee hunched over the table, holding his sandwich in both hands, thinking his question a long time before he asked it.

"You goin' there again tonight?"

"Yeah," said Striker casually, tapping a finger-knuckle against his teeth.

"You went there last night," said Dulee.

Striker glanced nervously at the clock, swallowed, and stared through the grey mesh curtains at the darkening street.

"You been there 'most every night this week," Dulee whined.

Striker sprang to his feet, quivering.

"Here, here!" he shouted, and slapped two nickels down on the enamelled table-top. "That's to mind your own business. I go where I like and when, see?"

He kicked his stool aside and strode to the door, disguising the limp in the leg that hadn't set straight, sparing a nervous glance for the men at the card game in the corner. With the door half open he levelled a finger at Dulee.

"Remember. At the barn. Ten o'clock. And *be* there."

He went into the shadowy street where footfalls were muffled in the warm sand.

One of the men in the corner said something and the others laughed. None of them looked up from his hand. Dulee closed his fist over the nickels, his sad, clown's mouth down-turned at the corners, withdrawing at once into the numb, defensive world of his loneliness.

Tonight was going to be different. Striker knew that.

Ahead, the last of the sun had tinged the sky with copper over the western ranges. The air was cool, on its way to the night's coldness. And Striker was already cold. A hard knot of fright in his belly drew grey, exhausted lines of fear in a face that now had no Dulee to be bold to.

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An irresistible compulsion drove him on, and he forgot that he had ever known freedom: a freedom that had foundered in the riot of feeling that came when he saw that *she* had noticed him. And now he was going because she would be looking for him, and he must be there. It was as if to his own execution . . .

Behind the low line of the squatters' huts, beyond their exudation of filth and putrefaction, was the area of beaten sand. The thin tapping of the drum came to him while he was still some distance away, before he came between the huts and saw the lights through the circle of bare legs—and against the glow of the fire in the centre the fluttering movement of the woman dancing. He hesitated then, until once again his feet moved him, unwilling, forward.

They were Mexicans there, twenty or thirty of them, some in wide hats, most of them men, but a sprinkling, too, of dumpy women. The men chewed and sometimes turned their heads to spit outside the circle.

When they did this and saw Striker there they didn't turn back again, but kept on looking. Because he wasn't a Mexican and because they remembered he'd been here other nights? Why else should they have looked?

He went on moving forward, very slowly so that none of them should know about his leg. They made way for him, and presently he stood in the inner circle of light and her spell was on him: the spell of the woman who danced, the spell of the woman and of the dance, the woman who had noticed him.

And she noticed him now. He knew because of the way she brought her even, white teeth down over her lower lip, threw her head back, and swayed towards him with eyes half-closed. And when she was so close that he could smell the bitter, exciting body-smell of her, why, then she had done with him. And she went on round the circle, sinuous, pliant; the palms of her hands, with the bangles at the wrists, pressed into her hips; and he was left thinking, I could have reached out and touched her, and now she's looking at the others and she's forgotten me.

And he looked at the grave, dark faces round him and wondered, Do they want her too? Would they throw away their lives for her this minute, the way I would? And then she was coming towards him again; and he knew that it was not the same with them, because it was him she had noticed; and now she came so close that her gleaming, black hair brushed his face as she turned; and he ached with the desire to touch her, just to touch her in front of these cold, scornful Mexicans.

The next time the rhythm changed, for she had bent down and whispered to the squatting drummer boy as she passed. In

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that instant, the boy's eyes had searched for Striker so that he knew it was for him. Pride thrilled through his hungry body.

Yes, tonight was different. He didn't know this dance any more than he'd known the others, but the beat of it quickened with the beat of his pulse, and the quickening of his pulse was new because it was not fear.

The girl, too, was not the same. There was now a diffidence in her, a shy unsureness that made him mad. She would only glance at him across the circle. And when she came up close she would not look but dropped her eyes; and as she went away his sweating, trembling hand came up in an unfinished gesture, seeking to detain her. And there his hand remained, so that next time it was the simplest thing in the world to reach out and take her by the softness of her arm above the elbow. That done, it was natural that the dance should stop, the drumming cease, and the stirring in the circle of Mexicans be the last sound in the arrested world . . .

It was out of the pause that Evil came stumping across the circle, scattering with his boots the glowing rim of the fire. Evil was Mexican, fat-faced and fat-bellied, a big man with an unsheathed knife in his belt, the tip of the haft polished with rubbing against the belly. He came across the circle and up to Striker and said nothing, but smiled down at him with dissolving anger, and butted him with his stomach and threw back his head and laughed once, " Ha! "

Striker felt the life drain out of him, the small ineffectual wave of his anger borne with it down to the familiar sea of humiliation. Already the drummer was starting again, the girl was resuming her dance, and the Mexican walking back past the fire with a snigger and sidelong glances at the scornful Mexicans.

It was the end for Striker. If he stayed, it was because he could not go: that small decision for the moment was beyond him. So there was nothing he could do while the girl, surely in mockery now, danced towards him once more, and away, and back again, and away again, with an expression that he did not trouble to notice, for she was already remote as the realization of his desires had always been.

Suddenly, from beyond the fire, the Mexican gave a shout and a clap of the hands. The drummer boy ceased his tattoo and rolled his big eyes in fright at the Mexican, then resumed with a different rhythm.

The girl, at the interruption, at once folded her arms and calmly stood where she had stopped, facing Striker.

The Mexican shouted again in some thick patois. She turned at that and shouted back at him across the fire. The silence was

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unbelieving. Then the Mexican advanced, scattering embers in a stumbling, shambling run.

He was not smiling now. His lower lip was out, his brows heavy over the piglike eyes.

A fist sank into the thick, dark hair and crushed the girl soundlessly to her knees as, without pause, he came up once more and looked down at Striker. There was a movement in the heavy mouth and Striker felt thick, brown spittle spatter his face.

Then the Mexican was away, dragging the girl crawling, scrambling along the ground, clutching at his hand with both of hers to relieve the weight on her scalp. He skirted the fire and she leapt with a shriek as she went through it, gasping, sprawling, twisting through the hot embers, and sobbing into the darkness beyond.

Striker put up an arm and wiped his face on his sleeve.

There was the sound of a lorry drawing up somewhere near, and from the distant darkness a bellow of pain. Out of it, crouching, ran the girl, to stumble on to Striker and claw her way behind him. He felt the fluttering, sobbing rasp of her breathing; felt, too, the cold haft of the knife from the Mexican's belt that she thrust into his hand.

And the Mexican himself, raging, mad with the pain of some undisclosed injury, was back in the circle of light and weaving slowly forward.

Striker, licking his parched lips, raised the knife and the Mexican paused. But only for an instant, because then there was another knife in his hand and he was coming on again.

Behind Striker the girl was whispering one word over and over. Striker thought, She wants me to kill the Mexican. And he told himself, I will wait for him to make the first move. But only a small part of his mind made this decision because all the rest of him was curdled with fear at knowing how close he was to death in the slow advance of this Mexican animal.

He anticipated the keen entering of the knife into his body, the slow suffocation with blood as he had once seen a man die. He was without hope. That was why he made no movement when the Mexican lifted his knife for the attack.

And it was this that showed the Mexican he could not kill Striker, because Striker was already as frightened as a man could be, so why kill him, eh? Something else must be done to make the Mexican feel better.

Abruptly he put the knife between his teeth and butted Striker with his stomach, the stomach into which Striker might now easily thrust his own knife but never would; and he and the Mexican knew it.

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The Mexican stooped, reached behind, once more dragged out the girl by the hair, and retreated to the fire where he dropped on one knee and thrust her forehead into the sand.

He took his knife from between his teeth, raised it, and held it there looking at Striker; then, in three quick successive blows, blind because he was still looking at Striker, he sank it deep into the girl's bare back, painting red, budding slits there. He rose and wiped his blade and threw her across the fire. Her skirt burst into brief flame but she did not move. Striker knew then that she was dead.

At once two neat, white-helmeted policemen advanced briskly into the circle of light, clubbed the Mexican into insensibility, threw the body off the fire, and lit cigarettes. They might have been waiting for just that moment.

Presently they both glanced at Striker. One of them said something and they laughed. The other called across, his voice quite friendly, " You want to go home, amigo. Wetback trash bring you trouble."

Striker looked round him and saw that he was quite alone.

" We movin' on tomorrow? " asked Dulee. " There's a freight train for Des Moines goin' out at six."

Striker was lying on his back in the hayloft and looking at the stars through the slit of the ventilator.

" We ain't been that way for a long while," said Dulee. " Maybe the season's later there."

The girl hadn't been anything to him. " Wetback trash," they'd said. And hadn't he made the Mexican think again? Yes, tomorrow they'd take the Des Moines freight and he'd think he'd just been damn lucky, that's all.

" You sick, Strike? " asked Dulee. " You ain't said a word. You're not mad, are you—'bout this evenin'? Look, I kept one of them nickels."

" No," said Striker. " I'm not mad. We'll take the freight train. We might make good money there."

And then suddenly he was rolling his head from side to side in the hay, his eyes screwed shut, trying to close his mind against the insupportable knowledge of what he was, and what he would always be.

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★ *Last year A. J. Lane, Assistant Lightkeeper of the Eddystone, contributed Grand Canyon to Argosy. Now on duty at Portland Lighthouse, he has written this grimly effective little story, which won him second prize in the Seafarers' Education Service Competition.*

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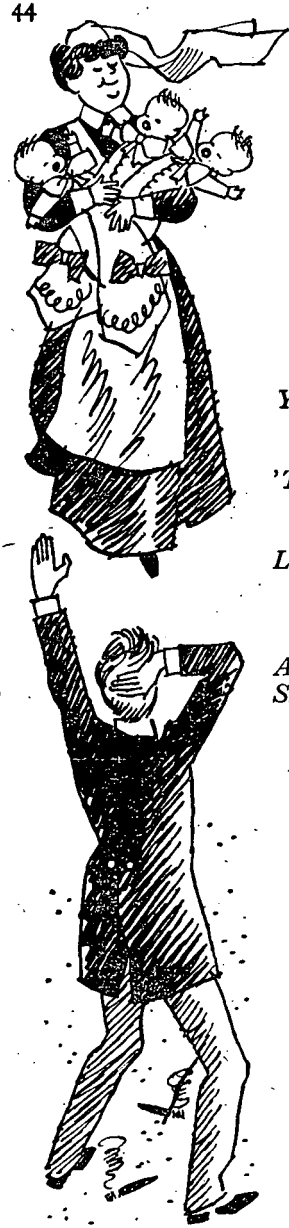

TOTTING UP

Where ever yet was found a mother
Who'd give her booby for another?
JOHN GAY

Sterling Worth

Yet a fine family is a fine thing
(Provided they don't come in after dinner);
'Tis beautiful to see a matron bring
Her children up (if nursing them don't thin her);
Like cherubs round an altar-piece they cling
To the fire-side (a sight to touch a sinner).
A lady with her daughters or her nieces
Shine like a guinea and seven shilling pieces.

LORD BYRON, *Don Juan*

Babysoxing

This same boy had another eccentricity from which I am sure the modern psychologist could make the most far-reaching deductions—a more than Swinburnian passion for fat babies, whom he called "pinglings" or "pudlings!" The sight of a pingling or pudling in its pram would move him to unrestrained delight, and he would cut out press photographs of especially fine specimens for use in a curious ritual of his own devising. Propping the photograph up on the top of a tall cupboard, he would stand close up against the cupboard and then

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retire slowly backward with upturned gaze, so that the photograph became gradually exposed to his view. When its full beauty was revealed, he would throw himself flat on the ground in an ecstasy of worship.

SIR CHARLES TENNYSON, *Stars and Markets*

Quizzical

I think that I shall never see
A Quiz Tot who appeals to me.

PHYLLIS MCGINLEY, *The* $64,000 *Answer*

Deprived Child

I formed the suspicion that my mother had probably at some time in her life been married, and had had a wedding cake, all without telling me . . .

"Mum," I shouted, transfixed with indignation at her look of innocence. "Were you ever married?"

What I thought were signs of pure guilt came over her. She was going to answer, yes, I could see, and it was shocking that she had been concealing this important information from me all this time. She gave a faint sigh and waved her hands as though shooing away flies. She grew red with the difficulty of replying.

"Of course I was—am—little stupid." Then after a pause, she said faintly, "Do you think I'd have had you if I hadn't—wasn't?" That was a reply which might be taken in more ways than one, I could see, but I had no time to take her up on it at that moment.

"Then you *did* have a wedding cake?"

"Of course I did. A wonderful one."

Rage and despair swept over me. I pummelled her with affectionate fists.

"Then why didn't you give me a piece? Why? I never thought you could be so mean." I burst into scalding tears, and would not be comforted.

LESLIE PAUL, *The Boy down Kitchener Street*

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Liberty, Paternity, Equality

Parents should love their children and each other
Equally—but that's not all the truth:
The father's not so equal as the mother,
And Baby's much more equal than them both.

KATHARINE DOWLING

Precious Little

When suddenly a chair creaked behind in the empty room! He glanced back over his shoulder: but there was only the other coat-hung chair, the bed; no one there. Yet the same little noise, like a bleat of stressed wood sounded again. Then rose abruptly from a creak to a belly-drawn wail, a terrible sound as dissonant as the torment of a tom in rut.

Matthew leapt to his feet. His heart thumped—there was appalling pain in the noise, it was a sound of loud and lonely soul-torn distress, something hollow and bad, and his mind went to tales of summery ghosts, of presences in the daylight . . . until his ears quickened and led him to the source, an oblong box of white plastic wedged between overcoats on the bed. And inside, among what looked in the half-light to be swathes of tissue paper, he saw something move.

He crept over and saw in the box the face of what seemed to be a small, bald, angry old gentleman. The gentleman had no teeth. His legs were caught up in some sort of loose white Indian trousers. His gum like a venomous underlip execrated the world and all in it, and an aroma of hot wet wool arose thick as the howl itself . . . when a smart young woman came round the door, stubbed her cigarette out and said to Ligne: "So you've found someone very precious, have you? Isn't he a little man?"

"He's very small," Ligne said, much relieved that this woman had come. Alone with the baby he had felt dark and huge as a preying eagle; he had never seen one so young, and feelings had risen in him of intense curiosity and dangerous power, mixed with terror at anything so small, so raw.

WILLIAM SANSOM, *The Loving Eye*

Small Mercies

Count your blessings, count them one by one,
And it will surprise *you what the Lord has done!*

MOODY and SANKEY

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WESTERN OCEAN

A wild and lawless love—
where islands slept in starlight

BY MICHAEL FOSTER

HIS family's parlour in Boston seemed very silent to him, remembering the great westerly gales off the Horn. After the long tumult of men and seas, after a hard-driven clipper's deck, there was now this stillness; and an occasional dry rustle as his father turned a page of the log book.

In the chaste white fireplace wood-flames curled. Here, on ebbing midnights long ago, John Adams and Paul Revere had enjoyed mulled wine made by plunging a red-hot poker into spiced claret—claret which the family's ships had brought in casks from France, and stinging with spices which the family's ships had brought from islands on the other side of the world.

But in this cold April twilight of 1854, with the elm branches outside the windows just coming into new leaf, it was fitting that father and son should sit alone in this formal room. Robert Haskell that afternoon had brought home his first command, the modified clipper, *Sea Fiddler*. As the high, sparred ship stood in across Boston harbour, flying her signals in the watery sunlight, he had seen through his glass the family carriage waiting, and his mother and father standing on the pier-head. Too dignified to wave, too proud. Just standing there side by side, watching him come in.

Other captains, of course, were received by his father in the counting-house on Haskell's Wharf when they finished their far voyages, but when Robert came ashore with the log book and the ship's papers, the three of them got into the carriage and drove home through the cobbled streets.

Gaunt with youth, in his sea-worn blue coat and peaked cap, Robert sat between his mother and his father: she in her heaviest grey silks with muff and tippet of ermine, his father with massive watch-chain and seals glittering upon his black broadcloth waistcoat.

Even the back of old Tim Murphy, the coachman, looked proud on the box above them as he handled reins and whip. He was deaf with years, he could hardly hear a word unless shouted,

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but he could beam. He knew what a family event this was. One more new Haskell generation had come in from sea.

The fire was already lit in the parlour when they got there, and for an hour the old shipowner and the new shipmaster were left alone in the room where their ancestors looked down on them from smoky-dark oil paintings in gold frames. There was a touch of the sea in nearly every portrait—the cocked hat and sword of a Revolutionary naval officer, a globe of the world with a merchant's heavy hand resting on it, or a dim background of ships and storm-clouds behind looped-up red velvet curtains.

And while his father thumbed the pages of the *Sea Fiddler*'s log book on his knee, Robert was remembering a wild and lawless love, lost now, in seas where islands slept with a surf of starlight. He was remembering his lost girl.

His mother came to the doorway again with a brisk rustling of silk. "Robert," she said, "you must call upon Dorcas this evening."

"Oh no, Mother," he said. "I'm tired and tomorrow will do just as well, and anyway I'd rather just—"

"Nonsense. The Hales will certainly know your ship is in, and they probably saw us driving home," she said firmly. "Besides, I have sent a message down the street telling them you will present yourself at eight o'clock."

"Yes, Mother." He sighed.

He had taken his ship round the world—beating past the Horn on a passage to gold-roaring San Francisco; they set out to the China coast for a part cargo of tea and raw silk (too many clippers had been built since the California gold strike, and one was beginning to have to search for cargoes.) Down to the Malay seas for chests of spices and logs of tropical woods; from there across the Indian Ocean and round the Cape of Good Hope for Liverpool. Then back across the storm-greyed North Atlantic, the Western Ocean, to Boston.

On this first voyage of his own he had known great passion and—to him—tragedy. And now he was being told like a schoolboy to go and be polite to Dorcas Hale, and drink a cup of tea.

Ever since they were children, it had been an understood thing between their families that some day they would be married. The Hales also owned a shipping line, and Dorcas was their only child. He could remember Dorcas as long as he could remember anything in his life, from the time she was a tiny thing with flying brown pigtails sunburnt yellow at the ends, who could climb a tree after birds' nests better than most boys in spite of her prim little starched skirts.

But she had grown up into a small and dignified young woman

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who walked so erectly that she gave an effect of stateliness, the very model of stiff New England female propriety. It was planned that their children should be born for the ships and the traditions.

And he—he had known a laughing girl of the sun, with carmine lips which could also twist with pain, and dark, floating hair, fragrant as an island midnight; a girl of vivid impulses so mysterious that he would never fully understand, not even when he was an old man looking back.

Rebelliously, but with the sickness of loss in his heart, he rammed his fists deeper into his pockets, avoiding his mother's calm, determined eyes. But his father, with a page of the log book half turned between thumb and forefinger, was looking at him sideways and very shrewdly. He had been a sea-captain himself, when young.

"I hope that you remembered to bring a gift for Dorcas from the East," his mother said.

"Oh, I brought a few things," Robert mumbled. "For everybody."

"I think perhaps I should be shown Dorcas's gifts," his mother said, "to be sure that they are in good taste."

"Yes, Mother," he said.

His sea chests had been brought up. They were in the wide front hall, on the polished floor. He got up from his chair and stalked out and knelt before one of them,—a small leather one, while his mother stood beside him with folded hands. His father came along too, looking slightly amused. Opening the Chinese brass lock, Robert hauled out a shawl, very old and pure white except for its central pattern of green and scarlet.

"Very nice," his mother approved. "This will do nicely."

"Here's some more," Robert said. He rummaged, and found a sandalwood box for handkerchiefs, and a small bottle of carved white jade for perfume.

"No," his mother said. "Too intimate for you to give a young girl. You are not supposed to know anything about her dressing-table. I will use these myself."

For his mother he had brought a brooch of soft Malay silver set with pearls, and two Kashmir shawls of darker tones. He handed his father a cigar case of soft green Persian leather, a small chamois bag of loose pearls he had bought from a smuggler on the chance that they might be a profitable investment, and a wooden box of black Philippine tobacco that he could smoke in his counting-house without making any curtains smell.

"Thanks, son," his father said.

One of New England's best moments had always been when a sea-captain came home and opened up a chest he had filled in

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strange harbours and islands of darkness and of danger. Robert knelt there in the cool, gleaming hall, while his father and mother stood beside him looking at his plunder from the East.

But when he called upon Dorcas that evening, with the shawl that his mother had so carefully wrapped for him to carry, it was in flatness of heart and conscience. Because he had a lean-jawed New England conscience built into him—like something in good sound shipbuilding.

He had to tell her. For if their expected marriage meant—on his side—only a possible lifelong duty, very respectable, it might mean more to her. He didn't know. They had never actually talked about it. Until this voyage—when he had become a man—there had been no necessity, and it was not in their teaching to talk about such things. Only, sometimes they had exchanged glances, and sometimes she had been smiling a little, quietly. And once or twice she had blushed faintly.

But they were not just the young people any more. He was well past twenty-three years old. He had been gone a year and a half, and now he had to talk to her honestly. He lengthened his jaw, and then knocked firmly on the Hales's front door.

Tonight Dorcas was waiting in their parlour when a maid showed him in. Small and very straight-backed, she was sitting on a grey satin sofa and was wearing a blue dress sprigged with precise little flowers, as cool and shy as those which appear in New England woods in early spring the moment that the frost is out of the ground. There was candlelight on her tightly-smooth hair, still catching gleams of childhood gold on its brown. And her eyes, watching him come in, were the far, clear grey you sometimes see on the horizons of the North Atlantic.

She swallowed visibly, as they shook hands, but hurriedly said in a matter-of-fact voice, " Father heard you had a most successful voyage."

" Reasonably," he said, and handed her the ribboned package.

" Oh—I—thank you, Robert," she said very low.

She bent her head, untying the ribbons, and he could not see her eyes any more. She pulled the shawl out of its wrappings, and spread it, and sat looking at it for a long moment. Once, her fingers stroked the heavy fringe of white silk, and then strayed, almost hesitantly, to touch its vivid central pattern.

Still not looking up, she said, " It's beautiful, Robert. I shall wear it with pleasure."

" I have something to tell you," he said as harshly as his own conscience was treating him.

" Yes, Robert? " she said.

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" I found a girl, out in the East."

" Yes . . . Robert."

That silence lasted longer. Somewhere in the dim, rich shadows of the parlour he heard a clock ticking.

" I was lying off a river mouth, to two anchors," he said awkwardly. " It was not the typhoon season, but it was open water and the tidal currents were very bad. Twice we had to weigh and stand out to sea, to ride out a gale of wind. We were waiting for some cargo to come down the river in canoes and rafts."

She had heard sea-talk all her life and she nodded mechanically.

" But the girl? " she whispered.

" Her name was Rita," he said. " Her father was acting as our agent in the settlement, inside the river-bar. He was an American, a southerner from New Orleans, and I didn't think very much of him, but he was on excellent terms with the local ruler. Her mother was from a Spanish family—they had been four generations in those islands."

" Was—was she very lovely, Robert? " Dorcas asked softly.

" I . . . Yes," he said. He knew his voice was cold with Puritan honesty and Puritan reserve. He couldn't help it.

But he thought, with heart-wrenching suddenness, O lips of desire, lips of pain, wanton with sun and laughter, lips of betrayal . . .

Dorcas said, " Do you want to tell me what happened, Robert? "

" Happened? Only a few weeks, such as no one else could ever know," he said bitterly, with youth's belief that his shining wonder and his sorrow were unique. He did not see that Dorcas winced. " And then an end," he said.

My lost dark girl, he thought. The curving beach of a seaward bay to which she had taken him along a jungle path from the river settlement. The beach was blinding white in the sun, but not so blinding to his New England eyes as Rita coming out of the surf with her shoulders and long swift legs glittering with sea-drops. Standing beside him, she would unbind her hair and lean over to wring the water from it.

Like most seamen, Robert could not swim and she used to tease him about it, throwing back her laughing head in the silent mockery of her gaiety-crinkled eyes and clear white teeth.

She had lived here all her life, swam like a native, and often dressed like one, for him. They would walk out from the settlement, she in a demure enough dress, but when they reached their hidden beach and she took off her dress to swim, her breasts and hips would be tightly bound in bright Malay cloth. In the late afternoon the opposite curve of the beach would be blue with

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lengthening jungle-shadows, and her drying hair was like a great fan as it spread across her shoulders.

" Was it a—a real romance? " Dorcas asked timidly.

" I suppose you would call it that," Robert said.

At night their beach had been dim, and their fire a dot of light between the immense darkness of the jungle and the open moving waters of the planet. Between the drowsy crash and receding sigh of the surf, and stars swinging low upon the dark sea-edge of the world. Rita's lips wet with tears, whispered harshly against his own, " Hush, I know, I know. Now I will go with you, anywhere on the earth, wherever you say. But I—oh, Robert, I am afraid! To be your wife in Boston, among women of your own kind, I am not like them."

The thought of Boston and his parents had secretly chilled him too, for her; but in spite of all he could say they clung to each other with the defiant and uneasy hearts of youth, while their beach-fire died to fading embers. He was going to bring a wife home from the East, and after the first shock, and after the first awful strangeness for her . . . " It will be all right," he had said quietly. " I will see to it that it's all right." When they walked back towards the settlement, the jungle was stealthy with small night-sounds. He kept his free hand on the stubby pistol in his hip pocket.

Dorcas's cool small voice said, " It must be wonderful to get about the world."

She had put the shawl aside on the grey satin sofa, but a corner of it lay across her knee. One hand stole towards it, barely touching it with the fingertips. Robert did not particularly notice, but everything that she had hoped, everything she had wanted, was there when she touched that shawl.

" And the girl's family? " she said. " Did they approve? "

" They weren't supposed to know much about it," he said. " They were a strange lot, anyway."

Too strange. Rita's father, too much the confidential Southern gentleman and looking like a Mississippi River gambler; and her mother, still with traces of hawk-nosed Spanish handsomeness, but heavily dull-eyed with apathy from the long boredom and failure of her life—her life in an airy, slovenly house perched above a jungle river and its low-tide mudflats, shining and stinking in the sun.

There were also two cousins of Rita's, living in an adjoining house. Cousin Edgar from New Orleans, her father's nephew; and Cousin Ramon from her mother's family in Manila. Of the two, Cousin Ramon had something of the air of the young grandee, olive-pale and arrogant.

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Robert's cargo had begun to arrive down-river. He and Rita intended to keep their secret until the day of departure. She was to come off to the ship just before they sailed. And when her father came aboard to pay his last call as agent, they would face him together in the main cabin of the ship, where Robert was master.

It was simpler that way. Otherwise, if they let him know too soon, that sallow and city-hungry exile might even try to hold up part of the cargo while he bargained over his daughter for money and a better life for himself. It was Rita's worry as much as Robert's. They would put in at Singapore to be married.

But Rita, volatile and emotional, had talked. Not very much, perhaps—he hoped it had been only a sort of young boastfulness among those people from whom she was to escape. But it was enough. Enough to betray.

"You said an end came?" Dorcas asked gently.

"Yes. I was carrying some pearls," Robert said. "A little leather bag of them that I had bought from a smuggler in Hong Kong. I always carried them in my coat pocket when I was away from the ship. I'd asked Rita to pick out four of the best-matching ones for herself."

Dorcas looked down, and quietly took the corner of the shawl from her knee, laying it aside. "Yes?" she said clearly.

"Rita must have shown her pearls, and spoken about them," he said reluctantly. "She had two cousins. One night they came after the rest of the pearls. I was putting some more driftwood on our beach-fire, and I heard Rita give a funny sort of gasp. I looked up and they were there. They had come out of the jungle. One with a pistol and one with a knife."

"And your Rita?" Dorcas said. "What did she do?"

It was maybe thirty seconds before Robert answered. After all, in a way, Dorcas had a right to ask these questions.

"Do? What could she do? What could any woman do? By that time there were two pistols and a knife out. She wisely disappeared," he said lightly, but not quite meeting Dorcas's far grey gaze. "When the fight started she screamed once and then ran."

There was another silence, even more constricted.

"Very wisely, as you say," Dorcas nodded. "What could any woman have done? Did you keep the pearls?"

"Oh yes," Robert said wearily. "They hadn't known that I, too, was carrying a pistol. That's . . . that's how I know that Rita—that Rita wasn't really a party to the . . ."

"I see," Dorcas said, turning her head away. "The fight," she said, "must have been a great emotional relief to you."

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It was his turn to wince. " It wasn't much of a fight," he said. " I shot Cousin Ramon, because he was the one who had the pistol. I tried for his shoulder because I didn't want to kill him, for Rita's sake, and I guess that's where I got him, because he dropped his pistol and went lurching off. And then Cousin Edgar made the mistake of trying to pick it up from the sand, instead of coming in with his knife against my empty pistol, and when he dived for it I clouted him one. I hauled him out and booted him and he left, like a singed cat, for the jungle. They weren't fighters. Poor ne'er-do-wells. I never saw either of them again."

" But you did see Rita," Dorcas murmured.

" Yes."

On the rickety river-wharf. Four days later. While the last of his cargo was going out across the bar, through a distant glitter of hot sunlight and small crawling lines of mud-coffee'd surf.

Rita's father had been standing with him, talking most confidentially about future trade. Once he mentioned absent-mindedly that poor Ramon, his wife's nephew—Captain Haskell had met him—had been injured in a hunting accident. A gunshot wound, young men were careless, he said. After that he went on talking about trade with the Haskell line, so it was possible that he didn't know anything about the scuffle on the beach. But he faded unobtrusively into the background when Rita came strolling down the wharf.

She wore a delicate white muslin dress, and was carrying—of all things—a little lacy white parasol against the sun. They stood there facing each other, not smiling. New England levelness searching for the exotic far into the tawny, brilliant eyes of uncomprehended southern races.

What she saw, from her side of the barrier, he did not know. Perhaps he never would, even if they were to be together the rest of their lives. And his heart, made desperately weak by the sight of her, wanted to keep its promise.

She said, " I understand why you've stayed away from me these last four days . . . why you've stayed on your ship. You've been thinking, Robert. So have I. And you're right. We had better wait, and think still longer. It is not enough that we have loved each other. I understand, please believe me. So good-bye, unless you come back."

For half a breath, shame stood in her eyes, and hopelessness; and he could not bear to see. But she glanced once, with bitter amusement, at the clipper riding to her anchors far out on green water.

Then she turned and walked casually away from him, past her

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father, past the Malays lounging on the wharf, tilting her parasol fastidiously against the sun, into whose full power she once had laughed. His lost girl, who had at least the pitiful courage of knowing that where there is no trust there is no life.

Robert shook hands with her father and dropped down the ladder into the stern sheets of his waiting boat, to be pulled out across the bar . . .

Studying his face through shadowy lashes, Dorcas said abruptly, " I don't want to hear any more. Please. Don't tell me about it. I don't want to hear any more."

" I had to let you know," he said in bleak stubbornness. " It was only right that I should."

" Very well," she said. " You have."

Staring at the floor he realized fairly completely what life was like for Dorcas, the gently limited life of a young woman of good family in Boston.

He thought dully of the patient and unpassionate waiting of a New England girl . . . being trained by her mother in the beautifully-exact running of a big house, going with her parents to an occasional lecture or concert, or driving out in the carriage with her mother to pay afternoon calls. Dorcas had grown up in a general atmosphere of teacups, and murmured conversation, and the Higher Things of the Mind.

The smells of tar and ships' holds were very far in the background, for all the sea-talk of their fathers. And the coasts and islands of fortune, from which came this quiet wealth, were so unimaginably far away that they were only parlour legends; except that young men went out there, and after a long while came back.

" Maybe you won't want to see me again, Dorcas," he said.

" Occasionally. I'll have to, I suppose, when necessary," she said. " There's no use in upsetting our families, all at once."

" Well," he said, " I'm sorry about the whole thing. It's been all wrong from the time we were children and they—"

" There was no need to say that, too," she whispered in the smallest voice yet. " I think you'd better go home now. Please, Robert. If you don't mind."

He nodded stiffly and left in a hurry, letting himself out of the front door. From the pavement he glanced back. The curtains of the tall parlour windows were only partly drawn, as was proper when a young man was calling, and over the clipped box-hedge he had a dim glimpse of Dorcas's head and shoulders. She was still sitting on the sofa, and her head was bowed into her hands, into the bunched-up white shawl from the East.

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That night he lay awake for a long time in the room of his boyhood. In the silver patches of April moonlight the room seemed almost unchanged from the time when he was a skinny little fellow, all knuckles and new teeth and big eyes. For he had been sent to sea when he was fourteen, in the special owner's-son capacity of supercargo's clerk, on a voyage to the West Indies and the River Plate.

His shabby old schoolbooks were still there, and his collections of Indian arrowheads and butterflies and birds' eggs, from when he was a little boy. And gifts his father's captains had brought him from distant voyages: an African spear, a Chinese chess set where, with Oriental logic the elephants couldn't cross the river in the middle of the board, a carved tusk of sea-ivory from the North Pacific. All such presents ceased when he went to sea himself.

Five voyages followed of successive training and promotion through the ranks of mate, under some of these same captains, until he was given a ship of his own.

He thought how astonishing it would have been to bring Rita home to this room, although he supposed his mother would hastily have had one of the stately guest rooms made ready for them. He flung one arm across his eyes.

But the sheets smelt of last summer's lavender and New England sun in his mother's garden; and tonight, now that he had come back, an Atlantic night-wind touched his face as unforgettably as it knows how to touch the faces of its children.

Lying there, he turned his mind away from grief, and his thoughts became sea-thoughts. He had always liked the old name for the North Atlantic: the Western Ocean. Coming back from the East, to those dark waters under scudding grey cloud-wracks, had been in a deep sense like coming back to the ancestral origins of his whole being.

He remembered the saddest and bravest and most haunting of all chanties. The last time he had heard it was from his own crew while they were warping out of the dock at Liverpool. On that voyage, *Sea Fiddler*, his lucky-named ship, had no real fiddler aboard to sit bearded and ragged on the slowly-revolving capstan-head, sawing away, while the rest of the hands trudged round and round him, pushing the heavy bars.

But as the ship's great yards swung around in the stream they sang—they sang,

Across the Western Ocean
Away, O away . . .

A rough roar of voices on an ebbing tide. After that, on the westward passage, came many days when the sea was singing,

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and men could not. The roar of the Western Ocean drifted him off to sleep . . .

The next morning his mother said, " Robert, I have our two family tickets for a subscription lecture this evening. I thought you and Dorcas would like to attend it."

" Oh Mother! Perhaps she won't want to go."

" Of course she will," his mother said. She added with a slight guilty blush, " Besides, I have already sent a message down the street, saying you will call for her at half past seven."

She touched his hand with a beseeching gentleness. And with an inexorable glitter of wheels, immediately after supper, old Murphy, the coachman, brought the carriage round to the door.

At seven thirty-five exactly, Robert and Dorcas were sitting stiffly side by side on the plum-coloured cushions, being driven through lamplit streets. Robert didn't say much, and Dorcas said scarcely anything at all—though they could have quarrelled violently and Murphy would never have heard them.

The lecture was to be delivered by a traveller lately returned from the Holy Land, a professor at Harvard University; and when they reached the hall Robert was weakly enraged to learn that there was to be a reception afterwards. He sat beside Dorcas through the lecture, but after it was over muttered to her in the crowd, " Look, I have to go down to the ship for a few minutes. We're going to have a refit, and the rigging people were already bringing their gear aboard this afternoon. I want to make sure that everything's in good order. I'll be back for you by the time the reception's over."

She glanced at him coldly, understanding only too well. " I'll come with you," she said. " This evening is not very comfortable for me either, you know. You can't leave me here. It would look most unusual."

They found Murphy among all the other carriages, and in a short time were driving down through the dark and shuttered business streets to the waterfront, to Haskell's Wharf. Both of them were silently and stubbornly determined, now, to carry out this flimsy pretence.

Leaving Dorcas to wait in the carriage, he opened a door with one of his keys and went into echoing darkness, except for a distant gleam of yellow lamplight.

The wharf watchman was sitting in his snug little shack inside the cavernous pier-shed, and as Robert passed he got to his feet and touched his cap. Robert walked on down the shadowy aisles between crates and bales. Away ahead was a dim square with a couple of wet stars, floating low. He went through that open cargo-door.

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All along the waterfront there was a forest of shipping, but the *Sea Fiddler* was the only Haskell ship in port just now. Her masts and spars soared lonely into the night sky. The lantern slung above the gangway was burning brightly and the ship's watchman was nowhere in sight.

In the circle of light Robert stood looking at the littered main deck. The open hatches were covered only with weathered tarpaulins, and the inevitable disorder on deck caused by the unloading of the cargo had been increased by the ship-fitters, who had brought a lot of their stuff aboard. Immense burlap-sewn coils of bright rope for new running-gear. A keg of turpentine for cutting paint, a couple of barrels of slush-oil which the riggers would use on masts and spars. These had been broken open, ready. And dozens of big packages of oakum for the topside caulkers. Some of these were broken too, with the oakum fluffing out. Robert picked his way among all this stuff, looking at it. And then he found the ship's watchman.

He was an elderly man and he was lying bound and gagged and unconscious. Robert instantly suspected harbour thieves. He had heard recently that in Boston a plague of these longshore pirates had ganged up.

He went to the far rail and looked down. There in the shadow of the ship was a dark, empty skiff, its painter tied close under the main-chains where men could hoist themselves up to clamber aboard. A couple of hundred yards off on the starlit water floated a low black barge with a lugsail.

Robert whirled sharply. Somewhere inside the pier-shed a pistol shot echoed and re-echoed. He had a quick mental picture of the wharf watchman sitting in the lamplight, an easy target for anyone creeping out of the shadows among the bales and crates of merchandise.

Unarmed and helpless, he had another mental picture, a desperately longing one. In a drawer in the main cabin a dozen new Colt .44s were kept loaded and ready. If only he could get to them . . .

He was afraid to go up on the quarterdeck and down the companionway, but there was a heavy door, never used at sea, opening from the main deck into the after-quarters. He undogged it, and slowly, slowly pulled it open so that the hinges would not squeak. The passageway with its stateroom doors was in utter darkness, but he knew every inch of its white-painted and gilt-moulded elegance. It was very silent tonight, after the travelling noises of the sea.

Moving cautiously he took a long time to reach the door to the main cabin at the end of the passageway. His hand found the

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massive knob. He pushed the door open a crack—and there was a thin filter of light. Somewhere inside the main cabin a smoky lantern was burning. Then there was a quick footfall behind him, coming out of a stateroom, and that vertical, dim line of light exploded inside his skull in a shattering radiance of agony, and he was falling down and down and down in blood-dark night . . .

When his brain fought its way back to consciousness through roaring obsidian waves of pain that came towering slowly one after another, he was lying on the floor of the main cabin. The back of his head was sticky with blood. Two men were bending over him in the lanternlight. They were lashing his arms to his sides with a piece of line from the signal locker.

Their backs were to the door; but when they rolled him over to tie a vicious knot he could see behind them, and Dorcas's face was floating there in the darkness of the passageway. Her face was very white and her mouth a little open, but she made no sound. She turned and ran.

Dully he thought, Another one—another one who runs, like Rita—like Rita . . . But he wasn't surprised. He took it for granted, wearily. What could any woman do? He was terribly afraid that Dorcas would be caught in the pier-shed as she fled back to the carriage, to the safety of the street; and then a black wave taller than the others loomed over him, and rolled him over, and swamped him, and his mind was going down again, drifting down, seeming to revolve slowly into depths.

When he opened his eyes the next time, Dorcas was standing in the doorway once more. She—she had come back. And the two water-thieves were staring at her, bulky, stubble-jawed, in clumsy, ragged attitudes of suddenly arrested motion.

And it was strange—a dreadful nightmare—because Dorcas's entire small figure was silhouetted now against a wild, red-smoky light which was just beginning to fill the passageway behind her. That awful glow pulsated and grew in sudden flares, in increasing power of light, and she was talking to the two roughs.

" So you'd better leave while you have time," she was saying quietly. " Because the whole town of Boston will be down on you within a matter of minutes."

From the floor, Robert managed a hoarsely-cracked yell of sheer rage. " Dorcas! What have you done?"

" I've set the ship afire," she said calmly. " It seemed the quickest and most convenient thing to do. To bring help."

She never took her chill, grey eyes off the longshore pirates.

One of them snarled deep, " By God, you little—" and started

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for Dorcas with his head thrust forward. The other one turned and looked heavily at Robert, where he was straining stealthily and fiercely without being able to loosen his arms.

But out on the main deck there came a sort of vast, long-drawn, fluffy explosion of light, airy and almost noiseless. The mudflat buccaneers faltered in mid action, shocked by the blast of radiance from the passageway, their faces transfigured by the glaring horror of the flames.

"No," Dorcas said steadily, almost dreamily. "You really haven't time to kill us both and still get away. Listen!"

From all along the waterfront they heard the first shouts, rising, multiplying, volleying back and forth. Robert waited. It was all he could do, watching the two men. Dorcas stood braced in the doorway as in a gale.

"Come on, get out!" she said, and her voice had the quarter-deck ring. Of her ancestors. Of his. They were Western Ocean people. Its cold, bitter salt was in their nerves.

From an open stern porthole they heard a heavy splash. Someone, an unseen third one, had jumped from the pier-head and was swimming out. The two men in the main cabin broke in panic and started at a hurried lumbering run, shoving Dorcas brutally aside.

A bass growl, "Arrrgh, you!" and a man's hand vindictively, in stupid hate, ripped clawing at her with thick fingers. Dorcas went primitively for his throat. He hurled her back against the bulkhead and then ran, pounding after his companion down the passageway. And Dorcas, with her torn dress hanging from one of her shoulders, stood looking down at Robert. Her hair was slightly loosened, too, making her resemble the sunburnt playmate of long ago in a blackberry-stained pinafore, whom he was suddenly remembering.

Sick and dizzy and bitterly helpless, he thought of some of her family stories. Her grandfather stalking into a Spanish governor's office, banging on the table with the brass butt of a pistol, and demanding the release of four of his New England men. Getting them, too, out of their cells in the fortress. But stopping to have a glass of wine with the governor before herding them back aboard, cursing them with great oaths for their carelessness in being caught . . .

Her great-grandfather in a fourteen-gun privateer sloop in the Revolution, engaging a British twenty-four. Broadside after rolling broadside and, when it seemed utterly hopeless, closing in with shattered sinking hull to sling the grappling hooks as the sides of the smoking ships came grinding together. And with the hooks slamming home all along the enemy's rail, maybe to keep

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the little death-cluttered sloop upright a bit longer, the last living hope, his great sea-shout rang out among falling timbers—the greatest order of the sea—Boarders away! And afterwards, sailing the captured British twenty-four back to Boston harbour with only eight of his own men left alive, and the prisoners-of-war below hatches. And on the quarterdeck the wounded Yankee skipper, Dorcas's great-grandfather, propped against the shoulder of the wounded British captain who had become his friend . ...

And Robert was looking at Dorcas's face. All this he could see now, in her. It had always been there for him to see, but he had not been aware of it. Not only Western Ocean and his own kind; not only something of America that they both had inherited, but a strength and shy beauty that was just Dorcas herself, and he guessed he had lost that, too.

They heard the scattered voices of running men coming nearer, closing in towards Haskell's Wharf.

Robert gave a violent jerk in his tight lashings. His head thumped back on the floor. "The fire!" he gasped. "The ship's watchman—he's there in—"

"I dragged him away forward, out of danger," Dorcas said. "That's what took me so long. I regretted the delay."

She crossed the cabin to the steward's pantry, got a carving-knife, and cut the signal lanyard which bound his arms. Kneeling beside him, she murmured softly, "Be still, be still now. Don't try to talk. I'll tell you. Your ship's watchman is all right, but the wharf watchman is dead. I didn't dare to say so before. If I had, those two louts in here would have killed us both. I had to gamble that those two didn't realize that there'd been actual murder in the pier-shed. The hangman will get them all now.

"I heard the shot and came to find you, and the wharf watchman was lying dead. But his pistol had been taken. I looked. So when I came aboard and saw what was happening to you, I thought it over and decided there was just one thing to do. I ran back to the main deck. All those fitters' supplies—I tore open some more oakum, and tipped over a keg of turpentine and a barrel of slush-oil on top of it. Then I climbed up and got the gangway lantern and smashed it into the mess. A scorched ship can be repaired. You couldn't—if they should kill you."

With clearing head, Robert began to realize the odds which had been against her. There'd been nobody who could help her. Old deaf Murphy away out yonder, who would scarcely have heard a cannon shot—and a murderer on the loose in the darkness of the pier-shed. To allow the willing Murphy to understand anything, a chorus of shrieks was necessary. The family used a

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system of signals, or else hurriedly-scribbled notes handed up to the box of the carriage. His mother carried a special pad of paper for the purpose, while his father relied on stentorian yells. It was one of the eccentricities of Boston.

But anyway, once having impulsively left the carriage, Dorcas could never have got back out of the pier-shed alive. The killer, hidden somewhere in there, had had to let Robert go through to be dealt with by the men in the ship, because at that time the wharf watchman was still alive and armed. And when Dorcas came along, the murderer probably thought that a woman couldn't do much if he let her through to the ship.

" Of course, Robert, I could have screamed at least once, before I ran," Dorcas said with a certain faraway malice. " Only, it occurred to me that a ship afire would be more effective, in the circumstances. But I'm awfully afraid the rigging is burning now," she added thoughtfully.

" Well, it's worked. Thanks, Dorcas," he muttered shortly. For once in his sea-life someone else had had to take care of him. Almost bashfully, he reached one hand towards her.

Beyond a tumult of voices and hard-running boots pouring up the gangplank, over the deck, they heard a distant clanging. The firemen were on the way. From the main deck came the bellow of a Yankee mate from some other ship, roaring orders. Robert took a deep breath.

Dorcas helped him unsteadily to his feet, her arm firmly round him. They hesitated, smiling a little. Knowing, as friends know, they could begin from here.

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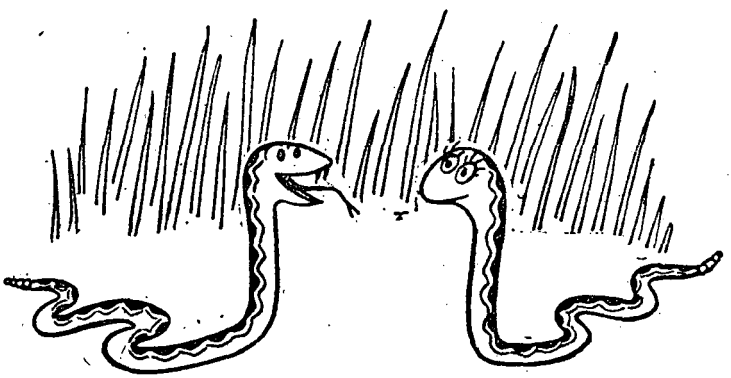

" How about a little hiss, baby? "

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WELL, I NEVER!

She was more and more unable to believe her eyes

BY MARY TURNER

MRS. CODY never had a nasty thought about anybody—and nobody ever had a thought of any kind whatsoever about Mrs. Cody, as far as you could tell. She was totally unresentful and totally uninteresting.

Even her husband never roused her to venom. In the days when there were landgirls, and the Codys' landgirls kept on having to leave because their uniforms no longer fitted, Mrs. Cody only remarked that men couldn't help themselves. When Jim Cody got drunk and threw the china about the kitchen she said, "Well, I never!" and left it at that; and he didn't have the pleasure of refusing her requests because she never asked for anything anyway. Or at least, only one thing, and that only occasionally.

It was the pond.

The Codys' farmhouse, surrounded on three sides by Jim Cody's indifferently-tended fields, was separated from the road by a sort of hole full of muddy water, ringed with decrepit willows, and frequented by some diseased-looking ducks. Mrs. Cody thought it would be ever so lovely to fill in the pond so that she could have a garden.

"Har! Going to hire a bulldozer, I suppose?" inquired Jim. "Paying for it out of your dowry, I dessay." Mrs. Cody had married beneath her and was reminded of it quite frequently. "And no doubt you'd like one of the men to take time off to dig it for you, madam?"

"Well, I'm sure you couldn't spare a man, dear." Sarcasm always slid off Mrs. Cody's narrow shoulders. "I could dig it myself."

"And let the housework go!" yelled Mr. Cody, dropping ash from his fag-end all over a bucket of clean washing. "Place is like a pigsty already. I'm sure we only need a few roses and it'll smell like a silo." And he told Mrs. Cody what he'd be before he filled in any unnatural ponds, and slammed out of the kitchen.

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Mrs. Cody smiled patiently and said, " Now now, dear."

Sometimes she used to pause in the middle of her work and gaze dreamily at the pond, a pail of pig-mash hanging from one red hand and pulling her skinny figure all sideways; or she'd flop over the leaves of a seedsman's catalogue, licking her forefinger, pushing the wisps of hair out of her eyes, and seeing the front of her house a blaze of flowers.

Then Jim would catch her at it and shout that flowers fostered blight, and how the hell did she think the pigs were going to fatten on nothing but wind and natter; bloody women, they were all the same. And the ducks would burst out quacking and slap their big, flat feet in the liquid mud, but still Mrs. Cody never uttered a cross word.

When her school-friend, Louise, wrote to her after twelve years of silence, she was terribly pleased but she didn't think anything more would come of it. She kept reading out bits of the letter to Jim over their dinner—all about how Louise's husband had a job in Ireland, and how well he was doing, and how the children, a boy and a girl, were twelve and ten years old—until Jim stopped eating stew with his mouth open and shouted for goodness' sake to stop reading about what kind of underpants her fancy friends wore and to give him some more tea, if you could call that dish-wash tea, and what did she do with all the money he was always giving her for housekeeping if he couldn't get a decent meal at his own table?

Jim had just suffered an amorous reverse at the hands of a young lady in the post office, and was not at his best, if indeed he had a best.

Perhaps the pain of thwarted passion had sapped his mental vigour more than he realized because, a few days later, Louise swooped down upon the farm in a very rich-looking car, accompanied by her children, carried Mrs. Cody off for twenty-four hours in London, and was gone before Jim could either swear at her or pinch her behind. He gave the dog a kick afterwards, but it was a half-hearted one which did the dog little harm and himself no good.

Mrs. Cody quite expected to be afraid of Louise's children, because they would, of course, be very sophisticated. But she soon found that they were far from frightening. They held doors open for Mrs. Cody, they told her about their hamsters and the house they were building in a tree and the inmost characters of the staff at their respective schools. And when it came to lunch at a terribly grand place with waiters, they read all through the enormous menu and then had fish and chips, so Mrs. Cody had it too.

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And Louise was so friendly and nice that she didn't make Mrs. Cody remember once that her own suit was seven years old. They talked about when they were kids and all the silly things they'd planned to do when they were grown up, and Louise made Mrs. Cody have a glass of sherry and it did her all the good in the world.

"I don't know if it'll bore you terribly," said Louise when they were having coffee, "but I did sort of promise to take the kids to the Natural History Museum just for a short time. They've never seen it."

"I've never seen it, either," said Mrs. Cody.

She thought it was wonderful—such a change from the pigs and the ducks. She looked at the humming-birds and the English birds in their natural surroundings—the farmyard didn't look at all like Jim's farmyard; and she looked at the skeleton of Brown Jack and said he looked funny for a racehorse; and then by gradual degrees they got to the prehistoric section, and she got more and more unable to believe her eyes.

Finally the children shouted, "Look at *that*, then!" and there was the most enormous creature she'd ever dreamt of, with its terrible bones filling an entire hall, and its frightful fanged head and its dragonish tail about a mile apart.

And before she knew what she was saying she came right out with, "I'd like to see *that* sitting in Jim's old pond!"

However, it passed off all right, because Louise and her children didn't know about the pond argument.

Very soon after they had tea, and after that they all went to a musical comedy, and it was the loveliest thing Mrs. Cody ever remembered, although she was afraid it was a bit too grown-up for the kids. Then they all had supper at a sort of Spanish place, and Mrs. Cody accidentally ordered something so hot it nearly blew the top of her head off; and Louise wouldn't let her struggle with it but had it taken away and a ham salad brought instead. And they both teased the kids because they had fish and chips again; and finally they all went back to Louise's hotel, and Louise and Mrs. Cody talked half the night and had breakfast in bed in the morning.

Jim Cody got himself his early cup of tea out of a beer-bottle that day, and went blundering out in the early light to start feeding the fowls and the pigs.

When he saw what was in his pond, he put his hand over his eyes pretty sharpish. You couldn't exactly say it was *in* the pond. Its monstrous haunches rested in the water, but its tail lay across the miry stones of the farmyard almost to the pigsties.

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It was sitting up with its neck snaking down to its horribly short little forelegs which clasped one of Jim's ducks, all smashed and limp. Its eyes went round independently in their hollow sockets, while the sun came over the horizon and showed up the disagreeably worm-like sheen on its under-parts. Even Jim, who was himself no whiff of perfume, noticed its smell, like things that would have been better buried a long time ago.

He said, " It's not there. It can't be." But he was wrong.

When it saw Jim, it popped the duck into its jaws and took one immense hop towards him. And when it had quite finished, it licked its lips briefly; spat out his hat, which it hadn't fancied and no wonder; and went back to wherever it was it came from.

Of course, the village would have liked to think that Mrs. Cody had made away with her husband. After all it would have been a very natural thing for her to do.

But to begin with, she didn't get back from London until after he'd vanished, and to go on with, what had she done with him since nothing ever turned up except his hat? So she stayed on and really the farm didn't run any worse than it had when Jim was there.

And good always comes of everything if you look at it the right way. They had to drain the pond when they were searching for Jim, so Mrs. Cody got her garden; and she used to spend many happy hours in it, even if it never grew much except plant labels and groundsel.

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" Excuse me—where's the luggage van? "

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STRANGE MIRACLE

" Look, look ! " screamed the woman

BY GEORGE LANGELAAN

SOMEWHERE ahead the engine wailed eerily in the night, and a moment later the smooth, rhythmic hammering of the rails was broken up as the speeding train rattled and banged over points and crossings.

Monsieur Jadant drew his new wristwatch from his waistcoat pocket. A crazy idea of his wife's, buying him a wristwatch—they were no good, never kept proper time, and he could never get used to the unpleasantness of a band round his wrist. He looked at it and then tried to peer into the moist, black night draping the train. Either the watch was fast—nothing surprising in that—or the train was late, which was quite possible.

Again the eerie wail of the locomotive. Monsieur Jadant let the centrifugal force crush his nose against the cold window as the train swung round a bend.

A small station flashed by. He barely caught sight of a man with a lantern on the otherwise deserted platform as he tried in vain to locate the name of the station.

A bell clanged and, still at full speed, the train was again tearing through the night. Another crossing jolted the train and shook the hips of the sleepy passengers in perfect unison. It was then that the train started to rise. Yes, undoubtedly, it was going up; going up exactly like an aeroplane taking off.

" This is it," said Monsieur Jadant aloud, drawing his knees up to his chin and burying his head in his folded arms in the nick of time, just as he was catapulted from his corner.

His head well in, clasping his knees desperately, grunting like an experienced boxer, Monsieur Jadant tried to ride the storm of shocks and blows that were knocking the life out of him. There seemed to be thousands of them, jabbing and pounding him from all directions.

For the last twenty-six years, ever since he had become a travelling salesman, Monsieur Jadant had been preparing for just this moment. He never travelled in the front or rear coaches of a train, the most dangerous in case of an accident. Spending almost a third of his life in trains, Monsieur Jadant had had

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ample time to study, to think, and to prepare for just such an emergency. And that was why, like a well-trained soldier, before even quite realizing what was happening, he had automatically drawn up his legs to prevent them being crushed between the seats, and gathered himself into a ball, the best possible position for receiving blows.

What Monsieur Jadant had not foreseen, however, was the time it took—much longer than he would have thought possible. Another surprise was the relative silence of it all; things were, of course, cracking and tearing, and there were bangs and the tinkling of broken glass, but really nothing like the thunderous noise he had heard accompanying films of railway disasters.

There was yet another tearing, cracking sound followed by the grinding screech of rasping metal, shooting sparks inside or outside his head—he was not sure which—and under Monsieur Jadant's left elbow a burning steel serpent ripped through his clothes and scorched his ribs. This was followed by a final crushing shock, a slow somersault, and complete immobility in an uncanny silence.

Close by, in the next compartment or what was left of it, someone started whispering, just as people always seem to whisper when a train stops at night in open country. Then a baby started crying, and almost immediately afterwards a woman screamed, a long bloodcurdling scream that ended in a funny babbling sob. Monsieur Jadant, who did not know that it was the scream, the very last one, of a woman who had just discovered that she had no legs, felt his hair stiffen on the back of his neck, although he was busy taking stock of himself, trying to find out the extent of his own injuries.

So many things were jammed against him, crushing him from all sides, that he was unable to tell which way up he was. He was no longer huddled, and that worried him. He could feel his right arm twisted back under him but he could move his hand—a good sign, he thought. His left arm was up by the side of his head, and with the fingers of his left hand he could feel a stockinged foot that seemed to be swinging freely somewhere to his left. Something hard and very heavy was crushing his head down on his right shoulder, and twisting his neck painfully.

Monsieur Jadant managed to move his left hand to his head and his fingers soon told him that he was being crushed under a large suitcase. He felt that if he could only push it a little to one side, he would have room enough to raise his head. Inch by inch, shoving, pulling, and twisting, he at last moved the suitcase aside, but no sooner was his head free than a soft, warm, heavy mass slid down in its place and almost stifled him.

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"Damnation!" growled Monsieur Jadant as he fought to free himself of this new trap. He gasped—his fingers sunk into the moist softness of an open skull.

All round him, people were beginning to move and struggle, moan and swear. The woman who had first shrieked was silent, but somewhere in the same direction a man was howling continuously, almost monotonously.

"My legs! God, I can't feel my legs;" suddenly gasped Monsieur Jadant, in a cold sweat: But they were both there, almost straight under him. Carefully, gingerly, he lifted one, then the other. If only he could find something on which to brace himself, he thought he might possibly struggle free.

"Your foot!" screamed a woman under him. "Take your foot away!"

"Damnation! I can't help it," shouted Monsieur Jadant, pressing both feet together. But instead of pushing himself free, he merely pushed her away from him.

People were talking and walking by on the gravel outside, so Monsieur Jadant called for help, but nothing happened. It was a very long time afterwards that he heard voices directly over him. He must have been asleep or perhaps unconscious for quite a time, because he could now see vaguely, under his arm, a grey shaft of light.

"Help!" cried Monsieur Jadant in a funny little voice that shocked him because it made him realize how weak he must be.

"Here, this way," said someone above. "There's somebody calling from just about there. Hand up that winch."

More people scrambled up, making a lot of noise, and Monsieur Jadant wondered if he was not going to be suddenly crushed by all the material piled up over him.

"There! It's a little girl . . . but she's dead."

"Under her, to the left, there—there's a man. I can see his arm moving. Gently now."

Monsieur Jadant blinked in the cold morning light as the dead child was lifted off his face.

"Courage, monsieur," said a man bending over him, "we shall soon have you out now."

A man whose white shirt was stained with blood wormed his way down towards Monsieur Jadant.

"He is pinned by something or other under his arm. Are you in pain, monsieur?"

"No— I don't know— I don't seem to be."

"Syringe, please," the man said to someone above and, pushing up Monsieur Jadant's sleeve, he jabbed a needle into his arm. "Won't be long now," he said, clambering out.

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" Won't be long! Won't be long! They shall pay for that," muttered Monsieur Jadant through his clenched teeth.

For a long, a very long time it seemed, men hammered and hacked and pulled and grunted all round him. He kept his eyes closed because whenever he opened them to look he felt horribly sick. Somewhere to his left a blowlamp was hissing its way through tangled metal.

" Gently," moaned Monsieur Jadant when at last two strong hands slid under his armpits.

" Stop," said a voice just by his ear. " He is held by that rail; it's gone clean through his clothes. Get me some scissors! "

At last, Monsieur Jadant was lifted up and out, and a dozen strong arms let him down again towards a black oilcloth stretcher. A man in a white overall gave him another injection as a nurse wrapped him up in a thick grey blanket.

Four men lifted the stretcher gently and moved slowly between two rows of heads.

" No, it's not him," said a woman bending down and, as though Monsieur Jadant could not see or hear her, as though he were already dead, she added, " Oh, the poor man! "

I must be seriously injured, thought Monsieur Jadant, who did not know that his head and shoulders were drenched by the now-clotted blood of the child. He closed his eyes as the stretcher bearers clambered down a bank and over a fence. They came at last to an ambulance where his stretcher was slid under another, heavily loaded.

The door banged, the engine started and, as the woman above him screamed at every lurch of the ambulance slowly making its way over a bumpy field, Monsieur Jadant muttered, " Oh, they'll pay for this! This is going to cost them plenty. Jadant will show them! "

" You must not cry, madame, especially in front of your husband," said the Sister gently.

" How is he, poor man? " asked Madame Jadant, sniffing and tugging in vain at her black jacket, crumpled by a night's travelling.

It was barely daylight when she had walked out of the little provincial railway station. Trembling with cold after the stifling heat of the train, carrying her small suitcase in one hand and her handbag in the other, stumbling a little over the cobblestones of the rue de la République, Madame Jadant had stopped only once—at a café to ask her way—but it had not occurred to her that a cup of strong black coffee would help.

Before pulling the great brass handle of the bell at the side of

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the closed hospital door, she had put down her small suitcase and tucked under her hat the long wisps of grey hair which she could feel round the back of her neck.

"He is quite well otherwise, and very courageous. Sister Cécile will take you to his ward, madame. However, you must not stay more than a few minutes, and then you can come back this afternoon during visiting hours."

"Yes, thank you, ma Soeur. I shall not stay long, I just want to kiss him. What about the doctor? Can I see the doctor?"

"Naturally. Come back here to my office when you have seen your husband, and I will arrange for the doctor to meet you as soon as he arrives, before his nine o'clock visit to the wards."

Following Sister Cécile through the swing-door of the long ward, Madame Jadant had recognized her husband in the last bed on the right and, without looking at the silent faces watching her go by, she went straight to him.

"My poor Louis," she whispered, bending over to kiss his cheek, her eyes fixed on the rosary between his fat fingers.

"It was the will of God, my dear," said Monsieur Jadant returning his wife's kiss and, turning his head towards the wall, with his right eye which only she could see, he winked.

"Are you—are you in pain?" asked Madame Jadant, not knowing what to think.

"No, my dear, no—that is—no longer. I feel absolutely nothing—just as though I had no legs. It's quite funny."

"Oh, mon dieu! My poor Louis. How did it all happen?"

"I don't know. There was a terrific weight on my back and for hours—I don't know how many, but as long as I was able to—I supported it all because just under my legs a poor woman screamed every time anything weighed on her. Maybe that is what injured my spine. I don't know . . ."

"He prays a lot, and we all admire his courage," said Sister Cécile a few minutes later as she conducted Madame Jadant back to the Superior's office.

"Yes, really?" muttered Madame Jadant, wondering if her husband's paralysis was not perhaps the result of a blow on the head.

It was only on the following day—she was returning home that night—that Madame Jadant screwed up enough courage to question her husband.

"Louis, what is going to become of us if you stay—if you remain like this? You won't be able to work, will you?"

"We must trust in God, my dear," said Monsieur Jadant solemnly as Sister Cécile walked by the foot of the bed. Then, beckoning with his forefinger for his wife to bend over him, he

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whispered rapidly, "There is the insurance, for one thing, and the railways are going to have to pay—two dead legs are worth a lot of money, I can tell you."

Again he winked at his wife and, since Sister Cécile was attending to the patient in the next bed, he added with a brave laugh, "With the help of God, I shall learn some other trade, that's all. Don't worry; I shall manage to use my fingers somehow."

"Do you really think so?" said his wife, thinking of the only picture he had ever attempted to hang, the one he had broken by dropping the hammer on it.

The railways had done things handsomely. Shortly before Monsieur Jadant was due home, workmen had come to remove the kitchen steps and build instead an easy slope for the wheel chair which arrived a few days later. The wheel chair was a beautiful thing of lacquered black enamel with soft cushions.

The neighbours had come round to help Madame Jadant cut strings and unwrap yards of brown paper strips, taking turns at reading the booklet of instructions and examining one by one the gadgets that went with it; the adjustable bookstand and the pivoting table-top.

But what had surprised the neighbourhood most of all was the return of Monsieur Jadant. They had not, of course, expected the luxurious ambulance, but after the wonderful wheel chair that was not so very surprising. What really astonished everybody was the way in which Monsieur Jadant had bounced out of the ambulance and skilfully hopped across the pavement and through the open gate of his little suburban villa with the aid of two brand new chromium-plated crutches. However, on reaching the bottom of the front steps, he had had to let the ambulance attendants carry him up as if he were a large bundle.

Monsieur Jadant at last found himself seated in his beautiful wheel chair in the ground-floor drawing-room from which Madame Jadant had extracted a number of gilt chairs, two round tables, and a gigantic green plant to make room for a bed. Had it not been for the remaining round table with its thick, green velvet cover on the hanging corner of which Madame Jadant had once embroidered the family initials in gold thread and, in the middle of the table, the great needlework box made of countless sea-shells glued side by side, souvenir of a seaside holiday, the room would have seemed almost comfortable.

It was there, a little like a king on his throne, that Monsieur Jadant received his neighbours. They were introduced one at a time or in little groups of two and three, as they arrived to

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congratulate him on his return home and to guess how much longer he really had to live.

All of course expected to hear a detailed account of the terrible railway accident, of the anguish and the horror which they had read about in the papers, the long illustrated articles which most of them had carefully cut out—the very least they could do since they knew one of the victims. To all, he spoke of God, mercy, and divine wrath. Most of his visitors shuffled their feet, coughed politely, and smiled awkwardly at Madame Jadant; one or two managed to nod wisely and sigh.

"That man is hurt, terribly hurt," said the local wine merchant to his wife, who had taken over behind the counter. "Hurt, there!" he added, solemnly tapping his forehead.

"No," chimed in the butcher drinking off his vin blanc, "it's worse than that. That man already has one foot in the grave. that's what it is. Only a man about to die talks like that."

"And now, close the shutters and lock the garden gate," said Monsieur Jadant to his wife after the departure of the last visitor. "I have something to show you."

"But, my poor Louis, dinner is already late, and I have such a nice little chicken for your homecoming."

"Do as you are told, and don't worry about the dinner," snapped Monsieur Jadant.

"What will people think?" asked Madame Jadant shrugging.

"It's dark. Don't let them see you, that's all. Hurry!"

When, having closed the shutters and drawn the heavy plum-coloured curtains, Madame Jadant turned round and saw her husband, she could only gasp, "Well!"

Standing erect by his wheel chair, smiling at himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, Monsieur Jadant put his hands on his hips, threw up his chin, swelled out his chest, drew in his stomach, and stood on tiptoe. Then, as he had learnt in the army years ago, keeping his body erect, he slowly bent his legs.

"There!" he exclaimed, a little red in the face after slowly bobbing up and down twice.

"They have cured you, then?"

"My poor girl, what a fool you are. Of course not! And don't go getting such silly ideas into your head. I am incurable, do you hear? Incurable. My—my—something or other—it is all written down in their certificate—is completely, totally, and hopelessly crushed. The great professor who came all the way from Bordeaux to examine me—the one the railways paid specially—discovered it all on his own. None of the other doctors had noticed it but, of course, they all agreed afterwards."

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" But then, Louis—you have cured yourself? "

" Me! Get better just like that? Of course not. I keep telling you that I'm incurable. And I intend to remain incurable until they cough up, and they'll have to cough up plenty, I can tell you. Later, if I get better and am one day even able to walk, we shall let God have all the credit and the glory."

" Louis, explain yourself," said Madame Jadant, crossing herself. " What does all this mean? I don't understand. I'm afraid, Louis. You will get us into trouble."

" Allez! Women are the limit. Never a tear on learning that your dear husband could no longer walk, but now you know that I am not paralysed after all, you start crying! Woman, don't you understand? Don't you understand that I have fooled them all? Every one of them, do you hear? Doctors, professors, experts, and all the others who came to look at me, examine me, touch me, push me about, ask me silly questions about my ancestors and the amount of wine I had been drinking daily. We have won—won, I tell you! We need only be patient, and the money will pour in; and now that all the experts agree that I can never walk again, it shouldn't be long coming."

The money was soon forthcoming. There had, of course, been previous offers of a lump sum, offers which Monsieur Jadant had refused politely but firmly. He had argued that, since he was now a cripple for life and could not hope to earn much, a pension, however modest—though not too modest—was no doubt wiser. But other offers, each time a little larger, had been forthcoming. The railways finally offered five million francs as compensation for Monsieur Jadant's paralysis. This was, of course, a sum any man would think twice about, and Monsieur Jadant had asked for time to think it over. No, that was not possible, said the two gentlemen who had come specially from Paris and who were to go back that night.

" Madame Jadant, bring us wine and biscuits," said Monsieur Jadant, and in a matter of minutes all the papers were signed.

" And now, what are you proposing to do, my poor Louis? " asked Madame Jadant, gazing at the five-million-franc cheque which the visitors had left on the table. " We can't buy anything, we can't use that money, because the day they find out you are not paralysed, they'll want it all back."

" So that's what you think, is it? Now, listen. With that money I am first of all going to buy myself a car."

" A car you won't be able to use, Louis."

" A car with which I shall resume my old job of travelling salesman. With a car, I can treble my earnings. I am well known throughout the country, and I can get other goods."

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"You're mad, Louis! I tell you they'll take your car away from you! They'll seize and sell all we have, and you will be lucky if they don't send you to prison," sobbed Madame Jadant.

"Damnation, don't shout and cry like that! Now, wipe your eyes and see who is ringing at the gate," said Monsieur Jadant, hopping into his wheel chair.

"Well!" gasped Madame Jadant. "Louis, it is the priest. Monsieur le Curé himself."

"Good. Show him in. But wait! Give me my rosary, it's there in the right-hand pocket of my jacket. Now run and open the door like a good girl . . . and stop worrying, please."

Monsieur le Curé came back often. He was full of admiration for such a man, struck down in the prime of life and finding God in such a serene, cheerful way: Monsieur Jadant at times seemed almost grateful. Monsieur le Curé had seen many sick people in his life; most were dissatisfied and a few were querulous. As to the few, the very few, who were resigned to their fate, there was usually something unpleasant about their attitude, as though they had surrendered. Monsieur Jadant, on the contrary, was not the sort of man to let himself go; accepting his terrible physical handicap with wonderful equanimity, he was evidently going to fight—fight and win—with his cheerful, deep, simple faith.

They had spent quite a few hours together, talking over the various occupations which Monsieur Jadant might eventually undertake to earn a little money. There was, of course, that young paralytic girl who knitted sweaters, cardigans, vests, and scarfs. Little by little, she had built up quite a reasonable custom through local shopkeepers who agreed to sell her work.

Monsieur Jadant might like to call on her some day, suggested the priest, thinking that Jadant's bursts of laughter and contagious good humour might be an excellent thing for Raymonde. No doubt about it, she too was courageous, but it was the courage of accepted defeat, lacking the warmth of heart, the glow of confidence that beamed from Jadant.

Monsieur Jadant's first outing was quite an affair. Monsieur le Curé had come to fetch him and had insisted on pushing his wheel chair while Madame Jadant walked by his side in her neat black suit. All along the street, people turned to watch them, and when they passed in front of the Café de la Mairie, the belote players dropped their cards to peep over the long window curtain. "There you are! There's the proof. Didn't I tell you that poor old Jadant was completely crackers?" said the proprietor, solemnly tapping his forehead with his finger.

"We are almost there," said the priest, a little out of

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breath. " Ah, and there is Raymonde waiting at her window."

" Where? "

" On the first floor, the first window beyond the grocer's shop."

Monsieur Jadant saw the childlike, sad little face and, sweeping off his hat, he smiled and bowed low in his wheel chair.

The grocer and his boy were mobilized and, since the wheel chair was much too cumbersome for the narrow stairs, Monsieur Jadant was hoisted up on an ordinary wicker chair. Puffing and panting they carried him right into the room of the pale, blonde, timid girl, sitting in a straight-backed armchair and gazing at him in wonder out of large blue eyes, a little afraid perhaps of this great mass of a man whose voice had boomed up through the walls and who was all at once laughing at and thanking the grocer and the priest, who was sweating profusely.

" He doesn't understand; it is as though he does not really know what it is to be like that," said Raymonde to her mother after the departure—just as noisy—of her visitor . . .

" But, Louis, it's madness! You are not really going to spend thirty thousand francs on a knitting machine you will never use? " said, rather than asked, Madame Jadant, drawing the curtains.

Without answering, Monsieur Jadant took off his brand-new slippers—their soles must remain spotless and shiny—stepped forward, stood on tiptoe, and put his hands smartly to his hips.

" Down . . . two . . . three . . . four. Up . . . two . . . three . . . four," he whispered as he went through his daily exercises, ending with a strange sort of dance, a fast round of shadow-boxing.

" Are you really going to buy that machine? " persisted his wife, wondering who Monsieur Jadant thought he was beckoning to in that strange way.

" Yes," he answered lashing out two more uppercuts followed by left-right hooks. " Yes, I am going to buy it, and I am going to learn to use it and make things with it, things that you will take to an address which that poor girl gave me the other day. Like that, everything will be perfect and in case of any future trouble, we will be able to prove that I had absolutely no hope of ever using my legs again," added Jadant with a knowing look.

" Oh, Louis, what do you mean to do? Won't you tell me? "

" Why not? Yes, I think the time has come for you to know my plans. It might even be a good idea if you were to start talking about them in the neighbourhood."

" Are you completely crazy? "

" No, just daring and brilliant; though, of course, you wouldn't know the difference. You are going to talk about it as though it was your idea. Yes—your idea. We shall travel, you and I. We shall go on a pilgrimage."

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"Where on earth do you want to go? The police will always find us!"

"My dear, we are not going to hide; quite the contrary. I want every one of our neighbours to know that we are off to Lourdes. And once in Lourdes, I shall suddenly find my legs—just another of the famous miracles."

"Well, well, well!" was all Madame Jadant could say.

Warmly wrapped up and comfortably tucked in his wheel chair, Monsieur Jadant was basking in the warm spring sun. Madame Jadant had gone to buy him his morning paper and his daily box of fine cigars. He felt satisfied and quite happy sitting out in the little garden in front of the modest but comfortable hotel where they had arrived the day before. His arms hurt a little because, that morning at the famous grotto where Bernadette, the little shepherdess, had first seen the Virgin Mary, he had thought it a good idea to pray with his arms outspread as he had seen others do. He could not kneel on the pavement, and just praying in his wheel chair would not attract much attention—and he wanted to be noticed. The outspread arms business had, he was sure, attracted a good deal of sympathy.

For the hundredth time, perhaps, Monsieur Jadant sat thinking over the events of the few months since he had found himself in that wonderful railway accident. No, he could not find the slightest flaw anywhere; everything was quite perfect. Nothing he had ever said or done could possibly be twisted or interpreted as the slightest indication that he had not been a real paralytic. All things considered, Madame Jadant had played her part exceedingly well. So cleverly had she alluded to the subject of Lourdes, that it was Monsieur le Curé himself who one day had suggested the pilgrimage.

"But I am not complaining, Monsieur le Curé," had exclaimed Monsieur Jadant. "It was God's will. I am beginning to earn a little money—I sold my first scarfs last week. As for my poor wife, such a trip would only prove a bitter disappointment for her because there is absolutely no reason for a miracle in my favour. No, no reason at all."

Without being able to account for the strange smile that spread over Monsieur Jadant's face, the priest had protested, "My son, you cannot, you must not . . . you have no right to talk that way!"

On the eve of their departure for Lourdes, Monsieur Jadant had suddenly decided to pay Raymonde another visit.

"I shall pray for you and bring you back a bottle of water from the grotto, Mademoiselle Raymonde," he said as the grocer and his assistant were about to carry him downstairs.

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"Thank you, Monsieur Jadant. I shall pray for you, too. I am saving up, you know, because I hope to go to Lourdes some day."

That night he condescended to explain to his wife. "Don't you see? When we get back, I can make her a present of my wheel chair—it hasn't cost us anything—and, at the same time, I can sell her my knitting machine for a good price. She will only be able to pay in instalments, but that cannot be helped."

The trip to Lourdes had not been too unpleasant, although being lifted into the train had not been easy and, of course, he had slept badly and suffered from cramp because he had not been able to perform his nightly exercises. On arrival, however, everything had gone smoothly and easily. The volunteer but experienced stretcher bearers had got him out of the train in no time and he had found his wheel chair already on the platform.

They had come early in the season, so there were very few pilgrims. Monsieur Jadant had decided that a modest little miracle was perhaps wiser than a grand affair during a large pilgrimage or in the middle of some imposing ceremony when journalists and photographers might be swarming around. He had given up the idea of letting the miracle happen during the first morning Mass which was attended by quite a crowd.

Having read all the books that Madame Jadant had been able to find about miracles in Lourdes, he knew that a large crowd might be dangerous, that the priests sometimes had to struggle and even fight, in order to protect a person suddenly cured of an ailment; he had read how, shouting and raving, the throng of pilgrims would gather round and even trample each other.

No, definitely, everything would have to happen quietly before a few witnesses with, if possible, a priest. The best time for that was at the grotto a little before noon.

Madame Jadant, however, was more and more anxious, and when she finally arrived to push her husband to the grotto, she tried to dissuade him. "Really, Louis, don't you think it would be wiser to get better gradually, after our return home? Many people are miraculously cured that way, after their return."

"No, certainly not! We must have a clear-cut, all-above-board, definite miracle. No one can explain miracles, but a good one cannot be questioned. Come on, if there are not too many people, we can treat ourselves to a nice little miracle."

"Louis, I'm afraid."

"Ah no! It's too late for that now. Besides, you don't have to do anything and even if you cry, it will be just the right thing, I suppose. Remember, I don't intend to get up and walk off, just like that. No, that would be suspicious. When you see me

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stand, just give a shout and then leave the rest to me. But don't be afraid when you see me fall. I shall only walk a little at first."

Trembling like a leaf, Madame Jadant pushed her husband to within a few feet of the iron railing at the entrance to the grotto.

"Fine," whispered Monsieur Jadant. "Now leave me alone. Go and sit on that bench over there." There were rather more people than he had expected, a mixed crowd of tourists and pilgrims, but he knew that it would dwindle rapidly towards noon. Many of the pilgrims were praying, some of them aloud.

Apparently without taking notice of anyone, Jadant recited his rosary. As people began to move away shortly after noon, he prayed a long time, head down, arms outspread.

Everything happened as Monsieur Jadant had said.

Though still trembling, Madame Jadant had not been too afraid when she saw her husband slowly stand up, his arms still outspread. She had been about to shout, as he had told her, when a soldier turning round had gasped.

"Look, look! He walks!" screamed a woman on her knees.

Slowly, his legs very stiff, Monsieur Jadant was walking like an automaton towards the railing.

"Miracle! A miracle!" shouted a man as a priest ran towards Monsieur Jadant who had fallen to his knees by the railing.

"I'm walking—I can walk!" he gasped as the priest and the soldier helped him to his feet. "Let me go! I can walk, I tell you!"

And as they released him, he again crumpled up . . .

It was only later, at the infirmary, that the horrid tragedy of it all dawned on Madame Jadant, when she heard her husband shouting and swearing at the doctor.

"Pray, pray, my son!" repeated the priest who had accompanied him to the infirmary. "You walked, I saw you. Pray! The miracle will happen again. Pray!"

Powerless, the doctor shrugged his shoulders and moved away from the bed where Monsieur Jadant was sobbing and raving, "Do something, blast you! I could walk, I tell you! Doctor, do you hear? I could walk. Damn you, doctor, I could walk!"

This time it was a human wreck that Monsieur Jadant's neighbours saw lifted out of an ambulance; no sparkling crutches, no handwaving, no smiles—just a bundled-up old man carried swiftly and silently into his house.

At the very moment when the ambulance men were helping Madame Jadant tuck her husband into his wheel chair, which somehow seemed much larger than before, Monsieur le Curé who thought them still at Lourdes was knocking at Raymonde's door.

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" There is something I must tell you, Monsieur le Curé," she said when her mother at last closed the door.

" Speak, my child," said the priest, drawing up a chair.

" I know you won't believe me, but please hear me out," said Raymonde, gazing earnestly at him.

" Of course I will hear you out. What is the trouble? " answered the priest with a smile.

Clasping her long thin hands together on the old blanket round her legs, hesitatingly, faltering, Raymonde told her strange story.

" It happened two days ago, Monsieur le Curé. Mother had gone to market and I was alone here in this room. I had just finished knitting a long scarf, and was watching people going by on the other side of the street. I suddenly had the impression that, behind me, the room had gone dark; and when I looked over my shoulder I was afraid because, although the sun was shining outside, it was true; the room had gone dark.

" And then, in the corner over there, but higher than the ceiling, in a blue hole that became full of sunlight, I saw the Virgin Mary! And she said something that doesn't make sense . . . but she said it, Monsieur le Curé, and you must believe me. She said, ' Raymonde, I have just requisitioned a pair of useless legs with which you will walk perfectly well.'

" And as I looked at her, spellbound, without saying anything, she smiled again and said, ' Stand up, Raymonde. Stand up and walk.' And when I walked towards her, she disappeared."

" Such dreams are current, my child, and you—"

" No, Monsieur le Curé, it wasn't a dream. Look, you are the first to see," said Raymonde, throwing the old blanket off her legs and slowly standing up.

She hesitated a moment and then, gently pushing aside the priest's hand, she walked slowly, very slowly, step by step, round his chair.

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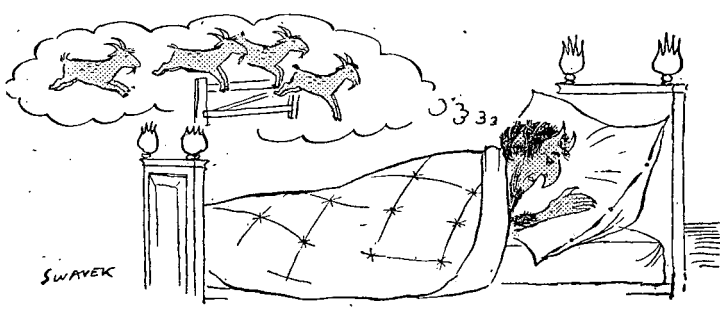

. . . two, three, four . . .

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SHOUT WITHOUT SOUND

In every canoe sat a girl wearing a necklace of emeralds—and little else

BY GERALD KERSH

AS Pilgrim started to stroll out of MacAroon's Grill, the barman said, " That'll be a dollar-ten."

Pilgrim slapped himself on the forehead, beat himself about the pockets, and cried, " My wallet, I left it at home! "

" Oh, oh," the barman said, lifting the counter flap.

" Here's the dollar-ten, let the man go."

But Pilgrim would not go. He took me by the arm, and said in an old-fashioned drawling kind of Oxford accent, " No, but really, this is too kind. I'm afraid I can't reciprocate. As a fellow limey you will understand. One's position here becomes invidious. You see, I have only just now lost two fortunes, and am in the trough of the wave between the second and the third—which I assure you is not farther off than the middle of next month. I must get to Detroit.

" But allow me to introduce myself by the name by which I prefer to be known—John Pilgrim. Call me Jack. In honesty, I should tell you that is not my real name. If some plague were to wipe out the male members of my family back in England, I should be addressed very differently.

" As matters stand, I am the younger son of a younger son, cast out with a few thousand pounds in my pocket to make my fortune in Canada."

I asked, " Was that your first fortune? "

" Heavens, no! A man on the boat had an infallible system for shooting dice. I arrived in Canada, sir, with four dollars and eighteen cents—and my clothes. I roughed it, I assure you. Clerk in a store, dismissed on unjust suspicion of peculation; errand boy at a consulate, kicked out for what they called ' shaking down ' an applicant for a visa, which was a lie; representative of a wine merchant, wrongly accused of drinking the samples. I went through the mill, I assure you. And now I am offered a lucrative post in Detroit."

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"Doing what?" I asked.

He said, "Checking things for a motor company."

"What things?"

"A word to the wise is sufficient. This is strictly hush-hush. Less said the better, what? But I can put you in the way of a few million dollars if you have time and money to spare."

"Pray do so," I said.

"I will. But not being a complete fool I will not be exact in my geography. Do you know Brazil? I know where there is a massive fortune in virgin gold in one of the tributaries of the Amazon . . . Oh dear, it really is a bitter fact that men with money who want some more insist on having the more before they lay out the less! Yet I tell you without the least reserve that I got about ten thousand ounces of pure gold out of the people who live by that river."

"How did you manage that?" I asked.

Pilgrim smiled at me and, as far as I remember, this is what he told me.

I dare say you have heard of the tocte nut? No . . .? Well, the tocte nut comes from Ecuador. It is something like an English walnut, but almost perfectly oval. As in the case of the walnut, the kernel of the tocte nut resembles in its lobes, twists, and convolutions, the human brain. It is bitter to eat, and is used generally by children, as we used to play with marbles.

Ah, but that is in Ecuador. Go into Brazil, to a certain tributary of the Amazon, and I can show you a place where these nuts—or close relations of theirs—are taken very seriously indeed. The tribesmen do not call them tocte, but tictoc, and only adults play with these nuts in Brazil—for extremely high stakes, too. Fortunes, as they are counted in these wild parts, are won or lost on one game with tictoc nuts.

The savages have a saying here, Tictoc takes twenty years to learn.

From vicissitude to vicissitude is the destiny of the younger son. I could, of course, have written to my elder brother for money. In fact I did. But he didn't answer. In the end, I shipped as cook on a freighter bound for South America. I suspect it was running guns. The crew was composed of the offscourings of Lapland, Finland, Iceland, and San Francisco.

I jumped ship at the first opportunity, with nothing in my pockets but the papers of an oiler named Martinsen, which I must have picked up by accident, and I looked, as one does, for a fellow countryman. Luckily—I have the most astonishing luck—I overheard a man in a bar ordering whisky-and-soda

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without ice. Blood calls to blood. I was at his elbow in a trice.

Breene was a huge fellow, and was about to go to the place—which, if you'll forgive me, I won't mention—prospecting for emeralds. Desirous of civilized company, he invited me to go along with him—said he would make it worth my while—and offered me a share in the profits. He found the equipment, of course—quinine, rifles, trade goods, shotguns, soap, and all that.

His idea was that, the market being good just then, if the worst came to the worst we might make our expenses out of snakeskin and alligator hide.

Exploring mud for emeralds, Breene stood on a log to steady himself. The log came to life, opened a pair of jaws, and carried him off—an alligator, of course. They tell me that a mature alligator can, with his jaws, exert a pressure of nearly one thousand pounds' weight.

It upset me, I don't mind telling you. Ever since then I have never been able to look at an alligator without disgust. They bring me bad luck.

The following morning I awoke to find my attendants all gone. They had paid themselves in trade goods, leaving me with only what I slept in—pyjamas—plus a rifle, a bandoleer of cartridges, my papers, and some dried beef.

Goodness knows what might have happened to me if I had not been rescued by cannibals—and jolly fine fellows they were, too. Sportsmen, I assure you. They only ate women past marriageable age.

They took me to their chief. I thought I was in a sticky spot, at first, but he gave me some stew to eat—it was monkey, I hope—and while I ate I looked about me. Anyone could see with half an eye that the old gentleman wanted my rifle.

Now I reasoned as follows—I am outnumbered about two hundred and fifty to one by savages armed with spears and poisoned arrows. In the circumstances my rifle must be worse than useless. Better to make a virtue of the inevitable and give it to him before he takes it away. Be magnanimous, Jack!

So, expressing delight at the flavour of the stew, I gave him the rifle and the bandoleer. He was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude and wanted to know what he could do for me. He offered me girls, more stew, necklaces of human teeth.

I conveyed to him that I might prefer a few emeralds.

Heartbroken, he said that he had none of the green stones, only white ones; and handed me a fistful of small diamonds to the value, conservatively, of a hundred rifles at a hundred and twenty dollars apiece.

I thanked him politely, controlling my emotions as our sort of

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people are brought up to do. But he mistook my impassive air for disappointment.

He was downcast for a moment or two. Then he brightened and said to me, " Wait. I have something more valuable than stones—something that will make you very rich. It has made me Chief. But now I am too old to play. I will give it to you."

Then he fumbled in what might laughingly be described as his clothes, and produced—guess what—a nut! Upon my word, a common nut, something like a walnut, but smooth and much larger in circumference at one end than at the other. Through years of handling it had a wonderful patina, like very old bronze.

" You know tictoc? " the old boy asked.

" I know tocte," I said. " It is a game played by children in Ecuador."

" You play? " he asked.

" Never. In Ecuador I have seen it played. In England we call it marbles."

" Of these places," said the chief, " I have never heard. Here, it is tictoc."

Then he went on to explain—it took all night—that the tictoc nut was not like other nuts. Everything, said the chief, everything could think a little. Even a leaf had sense enough to turn itself to the light. Even a rat. Even a woman. Sometimes, even a hard-shelled nut.

Now when the world was made, the deuce of a long time ago, man having been created, there was a little intelligence left over for distribution. Woman got some. Rats got some. Leaves got some. Insects got some. In short, at last there was very little left.

Then the tictoc bush spoke up and begged, " A little for us? "

The answer came, " There are so many of you, and so little left to go round. But justice must be done. One in every ten million of you shall think with a man, and do his bidding. We have spoken."

So, the old chief affirmed, the kernel of the tictoc nut came to resemble the human brain. Stroking his great knife, he assured me that he had many times seen one, and the resemblance was uncanny. Superficially, you understand.

To only one tictoc nut in ten million was vouchsafed the gift of thought. And the nuts, being very prolific, grew in the jungles in great profusion. Anyone who could find the ten-millionth nut, the thinking nut, was assured of good fortune, the old savage told me, because this nut would obey its master.

" Now play tictoc," he said.

I said, " But I don't know how."

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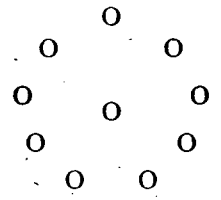
He did not answer, but led me to a strip of ground stamped flat and level, and polished by innumerable feet. At one end someone had described a circle drawn with ochre. In the circle were arranged ten nuts in this pattern.



The object of the game was to knock the ten nuts out of the circle in the fewest possible shots. As a game, I should say that tictoc was much more difficult than pool, pyramids, or snooker. You shot from a distance of about seven feet. It was a good player who could clear the circle in five shots; a remarkable one who could do it in four; a superlative one who could do it in three, flipping the oval tictoc nut with a peculiar twist of the thumb.

Several young fellows were playing, but more were betting their very loincloths on the champion, who had recently made a Three.

"Now," the old chap whispered, "rub the tictoc between your hands, breathe on it, and shout without sound—shout at the back of your mind—telling it what to do. Challenge the champion. Stake your shirt."

The jacket of my pyjamas could be no great loss. Furthermore, I had that handful of small diamonds, you know. So I took it off and offered my challenge. The young buck felt the cotton and put down against it a necklace of gold nuggets, the largest of which was about as big as a grape.

He played first. On his first shot, out went five. Second, out went four. The last was easy. He had scored a Three.

And now it was my turn. Caressing my nut I said to it, without talking, "Now, old thing, show them what you can do. Try for a One, just to astonish the natives."

Without much hope, and with no skill at all, I flipped my nut. It seemed to stop halfway, gyrating. Everybody laughed, and my opponent reached for my pyjama jacket—when, suddenly, my nut shouldered its way forward into the circle, and with something devilishly like careful aim, spun its way into the ten and pushed them, one by one, beyond the bounds of the ring.

You never heard such a shout! I had broken a record. Picking up my nut, I caressed it again and warmed it in my hand.

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The chief said, " This I have never seen. Two, yes. One, no. I know what it is—the markings inside that nut must exactly match the markings of your brain. You are a lucky man."

Feeling the weight of the necklace I had won, I asked, " Is there any more stuff like this round here? "

He said no, they didn't regard it especially. The ex-champion had won it downstream, where they picked it out of the river bed and gave it to their women for ornaments. A string of your enemy's teeth meant something, but the yellow stuff was too soft and too heavy. " If you want it, take your tictoc nut and you can win as much of it as you can carry away—you and ten strong men."

I promised him that when I came back I would bring more guns and bullets, hatchets, knives, and all his heart could desire, if he would lend me a good canoe and the services of half a dozen sturdy men to paddle it, together with food and water. He agreed, and we set off.

In fine, I cleaned out that village and went on downstream with two war canoes, loaded with gold and other valuables. I should have left it at that. But success had gone to my head.

On the way I stayed the night in the shack of a petty trader, a Portuguese, from whom I bought a suit of white-duck clothes, a couple of shirts, and slacks, and some other stuff.

" Your fame has gone before you," he said, looking enviously at me and then at the gold nuggets I had paid him with. " They call you the Tictoc Man up and down the river. Now I happen to know that no white man can play tictoc—it takes twenty years to learn. How do you do it? "

I said, " A mere knack."

" Well, give me another nugget and I'll give you some good advice. . . . Thank you. My advice is, make straight for the big river and the coast. Don't stop to play at the next village—there is only one—or you may regret it. The Esporco are the most villainous Indians in these parts. Don't push even *your* luck too far. Four ounces of gold, and I'll let you have a fine weapon, a revolver, all the way from Belgium."

The revolver I took, but not his advice, and we went on at dawn. In the late afternoon several canoes came out to meet us. My men spat and said, " Esporco, master—very bad."

" What, will they attack us? " I asked.

" No." They indicated that the Esporco Indian was the worst trickster and cheat in the Mato Grosso. But I fondled the tictoc nut, observing that in every canoe sat a girl wearing a necklace of large emeralds, and little else. The men—big fellows, as Indians go—had an easy, cosy way with them, all smiles, no weapons,

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full of good humour. They hailed me as Senhor Tictoc, while the girls threw flowers.

My leading paddler, the stroke as it were, growled, "When Esporco bring flowers, keep your hand on your knife."

Still, I gave orders to land, and was received with wild delight. The chief ordered several young goats to be killed. I presented him with a sack of salt, which is highly prized. There was a banquet with a profusion of a slightly effervescent drink in the nature of the Mexican mescal, but lighter and breezier.

In a little while we started to talk business. I expressed interest in emeralds. The chief said, "Those green things? But they are nothing." And, taking a magnificent necklace from one of the girls, he tossed it into the river—I was to learn, later, that he had a net there to catch it. "I have heard that you are interested in stones," said he, while I gaped like a fish. And he went away and came back with an uncut diamond of the Brazilian variety, as big as your two fists.

I displayed no emotion, but said, "Interesting. How much do you want for it?"

He said, "It has no price. I have been around, and know the value your people set on such stones. I also know—we all know on this river—what would happen if the news got about that there were gold, emeralds, and diamonds here. Your people would come down on us like jaguars, and drive us off the face of the earth. As it is, we have enough, we are contented, we regard such stuff as this as pretty for unmarried girls. No, my friend, it is not for sale.

"But I tell you what. It being a plaything, let us play for it. You have a great reputation as a tictoc player. As it happens, so have I. Now what have you to stake against this stone?"

"Three canoe-loads of treasure," I said.

At this, one of his sons chimed in with, "Don't do it, Father. The man is a wizard. All the river knows it. He has a thinking nut."

Apparently tipsy, the chief shouted, "Silence, brat! There is no such thing. It is a superstition. Tictoc is a game of skill, and I am the best man on this river." He became angry. "Who questions my skill?"

Nobody did. The circle was made, the ten nuts arranged at their proper distances. I begged my host to shoot first. There was a breathless hush as he went down on his knees and shot a perfect Two—at which there was a murmur of applause.

Then I stroked my nut and asked it for a One. Out it went, spinning like a little whirlwind, and a One it was.

It is etiquette, in the tictoc game, for the winner to pick up the

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fighting nuts and bring them back to the base. Loser shoots first. This time the chief shot a Three. I was feeling warm-hearted. Who wouldn't, if he was certain to win a diamond that would make the Koh-i-noor and the Cullinan diamonds look like stones in a ten-guinea engagement ring?

So I said to my nut, "This time, for the fun of the thing, get me a Five. But last shot we'll have another One, and the best out of three games."

It did as it was bid, and I lost with a Five. The chief, much elated, got our nuts and handed me mine with grave courtesy. I shot with perfect confidence. Imagine my horror when, instead of moving with grace and deliberation, it reeled drunkenly forward and barely reached the periphery of the circle! I wondered, could that mescal-like stuff I had drunk have gone to its head through mine? Thinking with all my might, I shot again—and knocked one nut out of the ring. A third time, and I finished with an Eight.

The chief went to pick up our nuts. I was numb with grief. He handed me the nut I had played that last game with. I looked at it—and it was not my own!

Then the truth dawned on me. The old rascal had swapped nuts after the second game! Simple as that. But I kept my temper, because in a split second everybody had stopped laughing, and every man had produced a machete, an axe, a bow, or a spear.

I said, "There is some mistake here, sir. This is not my tictoc nut."

"Then whose is it?"

"Yours. You are, no doubt inadvertently, holding mine in your hand. Give it back, if you please."

And driven beyond prudence, I made a grab at it. I was fast, but he was faster, and surprisingly strong. I, too, am tolerably strong in the fingers. We stood locked, hand to hand, for about twenty seconds. Then I heard and felt a sharp little crack. So did he, for he stood back, waving away his tribesmen who were closing in.

He held out his hand with dignity. It held the common tictoc nut that he had palmed off on me. In my palm lay my own true nut, but split down the centre, exposing the kernel.

I looked at it, fascinated. You know, I studied medicine once—might be in Harley Street by now, only there was a bureaucratic misunderstanding about four microscopes I borrowed. Silly asses! I'd have got them out of pawn and put them back where I'd found them, as soon as my allowance came in. But no, they gave me the sack.

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However, I have read some anatomy, and I solemnly swear that the kernel of my poor tictoc nut definitely and in detail resembled the human brain—convolutions, lobes, cerebrum, cerebellum, medulla—in every respect.

Most remarkable of all, when I touched it affectionately with my fingertip, it throbbed very faintly, and then lay still. Whereupon some of the virtue seemed to drain out of me, and I cried like a child.

But I pulled myself together and said, "Well, the bet is off. The game is null and void. Let me get my men together and push off."

Then, in the light of torches, I saw bundles on the shore—very familiar bundles.

"To save your men unnecessary exertion," the chief said, "I had your canoes unloaded for you. I wish you no harm, but suggest that you go quietly back where you belong.

"Come, you shall not go empty handed. Take as many small nuggets as your two hands can hold, and depart in peace. You over-reached yourself. I would have given you the diamond for the thinking nut, and gladly, in fair exchange. But no, you had to cheat, to do bad trade, to bet on a sure thing. In this life, nothing is sure."

I said, holding out the revolver, "And what will you give me for this?"

"Oh, two double handfuls of gold."

"May I suggest three?"

"If you will allow me to test it first."

I did. He fired one shot into the dark. I took the gun back and said, "First the gold."

Down by the river I took the liberty of scooping up a handful of heavy clay and filling the barrel of that revolver. It would dry like brick. That old rogue would never play tictoc again.

But in burying the remains of my thinking nut, I had a weird feeling that I was leaving behind an essential portion of myself. Gold and jewels I can get again. But that, never.

So I got to the coast and took ship, as a passenger this time, on a heavy freighter bound for Tampa, Florida. What with one thing and another, I arrived with only a few nuggets left, which I keep as—I don't know, call them keepsakes. You have been very kind to me. Let me give you one—a very little one—and then I must be on my way. Have this one."

He dropped a heavy gold pellet on the wet table. It was not much larger than a pea, but shaped, or misshaped, beyond human conception. Fire and water had done that.

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" Have it made into a tie pin," said Pilgrim.

" But I couldn't take a valuable thing like this," I cried, " without doing something for you in return! "

" Not a bit of it. We limeys must stick together, and I'm on my way to Detroit. About seven days from now, John Pilgrim, at Detroit's leading hotel, will find me. Help me on my way, if you like, but—" He shrugged.

" I have only ten dollars," I said, deeply moved by a certain sadness in Pilgrim's eyes. " You're welcome to that."

" You're very obliging. It shall be returned with interest."

" I must go now," I said.

" So must I," said he . . .

Marvelling at the intricacies of the human mind, I walked until I found myself on Sixth Avenue, near West 46th Street, in which area congregate those who, with pitying smiles and a certain kind of shrug, can flaw a diamond carat by carat until you are ashamed to own it, and with a shake of the head depreciate a watch until it stops of its own accord.

On impulse I went into a shop there and, putting down Pilgrim's nugget, asked what such a bit of gold might be worth.

His reply was, " You kidding? What's the current price of printer's metal . . . ? Worth? Why they sell those for fifty cents apiece. I can get 'em for you a dollar for two dozen. A teaspoonful of lead, melt it and drop it in cold water. You can honestly advertise ' no two alike.' Gild 'em, and there's a nugget, a miniature gold brick. Seriously, did you buy this? "

I said, " Yes and no."

But as I dropped the nugget into my pocket and turned to go, the man said, " Wait a minute, it's a nice imitation and good plating. Maybe I could give you a couple of bucks for it? "

" Oh no, you won't," I said, my suspicions aroused. I fondled the nugget in my pocket—it had the indescribable, authentic feel of real gold. As for that trick with melted lead and cold water, I suddenly remembered that I had played it, about thirty years before, with broken toy soldiers, just for the sake of playing with fire. Recently-melted lead has a feel all its own, and is sharp at the edges. But my nugget felt old and worn.

" It could be, after forty years, that for once I've made a mistake," the man said. " Let's have another look."

But I went out, and visited another shop a few doors away—one of those double-fronted establishments, in the right-hand window of which, under a sign, saying OLD GOLD BOUGHT, there lies a mess of pinchbeck bracelets, ancient watch-chains, old false teeth, and tie pins. In the other window, diamonds carefully carded and priced at anything between two thousand and fifteen thousand

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dollars. The proprietor looked as if he were next door but one to the breadline.

I put down my nugget and said boldly, " How much for this? "

He scrutinized the nugget, put it in a balance, and weighed it; then tested it on a jeweller's stone with several kinds of acid. " Virgin gold," he said. " Where'd you get it? "

" A friend gave it to me."

" I wish I had such friends." He called, " Irving, come here a minute," and a younger man came to his side. " What d'you make of this? "

Irving said, " It ain't African gold. It ain't Indian gold. It ain't a California nugget. I say South America."

" Good boy. Correct."

" How can you tell? " I asked.

He shrugged. " You learn," he said. " How d'you tell the difference between a Brazilian diamond, an African diamond, an Indian diamond? How d'you tell the difference between salt and sugar? You learn . . . The market value of this little bit of virgin gold is about forty dollars. I'll give you thirty-five."

" Eh? "

" Thirty-six, and not a penny more," he said, counting out the money. " And if your friend gives you any more, come to me."

I took the money, caught a taxi, and hurried back to MacAroon's place. The barman was gazing into space.

" That man I was sitting with," I said, " where is he? "

The barman, with a sardonic smile, said, " He pulled a fast one on you, huh? I can smell a phoney a mile off. I didn't like the look of him as soon as he set foot in my bar. If I was you—"

" Which way did he go? "

" I didn't notice."

" Here's my telephone number," I said. " If he turns up again, ring me and hold him till I get here. Here's five dollars on account, another five when you ring."

But Pilgrim never came to MacAroon's again.

I inquired high and low—mostly low—but found no trace of him. A British-sounding man with an insinuating air, a malarial complexion, and a misleadingly eccentric manner, who talks about the River Amazon and its tributaries—I will pay a substantial reward for information leading to his rediscovery.

★ ★ ★

THE SHE IN SHEBA

Glamour is when a man knows a woman is a woman.

GINA LOLLOBRIGIDA

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GUESSING

Yes! she loves me, this I know,
For the petals of the daisy tell me so.

I've been sitting here with Phyllis
Picking petals off the lilies—
Picking petals off the roses
In the good old way;
I've been sitting here since lunch
Wrecking roses by the bunch,
And I doubt if I proposes
For they all say "Nay!"

He loves me? He loves me not?
This booby of a man—
He loves me not? He loves me?
Is it me or is it Ann?
He loves me—will he kiss me?
If he wants to, well, he can.
He loves me? He loves me not?
He loves me not? He loves me!

A. P. HERBERT

Charming Illusion

He made a lanthorn of coloured glass, too, the colour of red roses, and while Jancis sat in the stone frame of the window he hung it up above her with a great candle in it from foreign parts, not a rushlight such as we used. He had it in mind that if some great gentleman came by, to a fair or a cockfight beyond the mountains, he might fall in love with her, and then Beguildy planned to bring him in and give him strong ale and talk about charms and spells, and offer at long last to work the charm of raising Venus . . . He said a charm, and after awhile, there was a pink light and a scent of roses, and Venus rose naked in the middle of the room. Only it wouldna have been Venus, but Jancis.

MARY WEBB, *Precious Bane*

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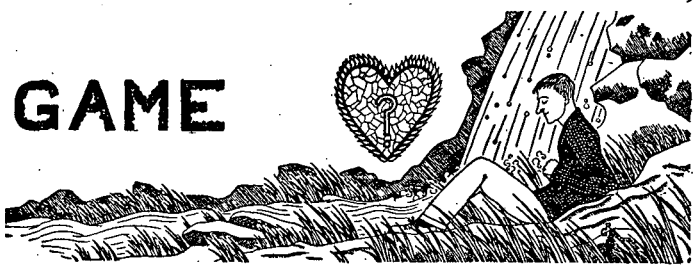
GAME



Straws show—

Peace, the wild valley streaked with torrents,
A hoopoe perched on his warm rock. Then why
This tremor of the straw between my fingers?

What should I fear? Have I not testimony
In her own hand, signed with her own name
That my love fell as lightning on her heart?

ROBERT GRAVES, *The Straw*

—which Way the Wind Blows

" It's the shrine where they do a sort of fortune-telling," she said. " He only wants to know if you wish to have your fortunes told? "

" Oh yes, come on, do let's! " said Judith. Henri and Annette joined them, and the whole party entered the shrine. The bonze carefully closed the doors behind them, and they stood in the cool gloom, heavy with the smell of incense, before a small and rather unimposing Buddha, seated as usual behind a long narrow table full of incense-burners and ornaments . . .

" Now who's for truth at fifty cents? " said Touchy. Henri stepped forward with his coin. " I 'ope 'e does not refer always to children, this Boudha," he murmured in an aside to Touchy, who giggled.

But when Henri's slip was read out it appeared that he did. " The children of the virtuous bring no anxiety." Derek and Touchy burst out laughing.

ANN BRIDGE, *Peking Picnic*

Chain Reaction

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do!
I'm half crazy, all for the love of you.

HARRY DACRE

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He loves me, he loves me not . . .

Useless to put the question to the grass
As to—he loves, or he loves me not,
The nodding field's indifferent, divided
Exactly on the matter, which is what
The law of averages made one fear.
Daisies, the same, one can't believe a word,
Since each negates the last, and as for cuckoos!
The last of those false prophets that I heard
Foretold I'd have two hundred kids, if any,
And even if he loves me, that's too many.

JEAN KEEGAN ROSCOE

Elle m'aime, un peu, beaucoup . . .

French plums appeared regularly, in their squat tubby little bottle . . . He had, indeed, been known to finish off a bottle at a single sitting, and to tell the chaplet, Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Gentleman, Apothecary, Ploughboy, Thief, several times over in the garland of stones arranged round the edge of his plate. What more natural, therefore, than that his mother should notice that he now never ate more than four? Or, if pressed, was consistent in bringing the tally up to nine?

She tested him more than once, dining alone with him and Viola at Chevron; always four stones, or nine. "This year, next year, now or never?" she twitted him; that fitted the four, but not the nine. Then it dawned on her; *Elle m'aime, un peu, beaucoup, passionnement*—and she saw the arithmetic which would bring it to *pas du tout*. Then, being committed to numbers, how could she fail to put two and two together?

V. SACKVILLE-WEST, *The Edwardians*

Counted Out

To a heart full of love let me hold thee,
To a heart which, dear Chloe, is thine;
With my arms I'll for ever enfold thee,
And twist round thy limbs like a vine.
What joy can be greater than this is?
My life on thy lips shall be spent;
But the wretch that can number his kisses
With few will be ever content.

SIR CHARLES HANBURY WILLIAMS, 1755

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OLD MAN KANGAROO

Feet tore the dust, bracing tails made great skid marks—
the reaping toe struck

BY MACKENZIE COTTRELL

OVER the ironstone ranges, twenty miles to the south, the purple blackness of storm rolled, the hills were hidden by lead-grey deluges of rain, but in the dry watercourse where the kangaroo mob lay bedded was hot sunlight. Broad seedheads of kangaroo grass were dark gold and light gold against the brilliant azure of the zenith, and occasionally a henna-and-black butterfly would alight on a seedhead, fold its wings to show the paler underveining, and sleep in the sweet drift of air.

The old man kangaroo, lying on the down-beaten grass mattress of his form, noted the swaying seedheads and the butterflies and above them the round and glittering leaves of the box tree. He licked his large forearms so that the air might cool them.

He had spent the previous night below the dam up the watercourse, enjoying the honied lily flowers, so that from his delicately-veined ears to his powerful tailtip, he was now aware of a sense of good nourishment.

His does were large-eyed, velvet-furred, and many.

His own coat was glossy as thick-piled velvet and shaded from chestnut through tan to the rich cream of his underbody. He weighed two hundred pounds and could stand seven feet when he rose on his toes and the ponderous but graceful arch of his tail.

Only this morning he had thumped defiantly at his rival, the young sultan of the mob two miles down the watercourse, and the younger 'roo had retreated. So he could now lick his arms, doze, or lie on his back, playing with the deadly reaping-hook of his own great toe, ignoring the instinctive awareness that sooner or later the aggressive newcomer would force battle. For the moment, his sole annoyance was an occasional black ant.

The constant roll of thunder from the storm and the blue-blackness of its still-increasing cloud mountains merely accentuated the peace of the watercourse. The bees buzzing at the cream bells of a sandalwood tree made a drowsy song. The dry gold

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of the kangaroo grass crackled to little tunes of heat.

And on a pleasantly sandy space beyond the box tree trunk, the amiable family life of the mob went on in the flicker of sun and shadow. Young does lay gracefully, occasionally turning to pat at each other's ears or rolling on their back to toss and catch a dry leaf. Mothers licked and petted fat joeys, while does with joeys still too young to leave the pouch held their pouch mouths open with their hands to let them cool.

One red velvet-coated youngster, tired of having his ears washed, ignored his mother's warnings and bolted with tiny hops into the grass, to fall sprawling in a patch of lilac-flowered bindesi-burrs which stuck to his hands, then pricked his tongue as he tried to get them off. Frightened by this new and painful experience, he scrambled up and dashed through still thicker burrs to get back to his mother—reaching her with a wild succession of tiny hops, to open her pouch with his hands and turn a neat somersault into its shelter.

Unable for a moment to believe what had happened, the doe sat helplessly, her hands hanging limply at her sides. Then she gave a chirrup of rage, plunged her small, dark hands into her pouch to catch her pincushion of a son, dragged him out, set him down violently, and boxed his ears; then began the long process of de-burring him and her own pouch. Each time she got a burr out of her pouch-lining, she scolded her son again. At times she wiped her own face.

The bees were the first to know that something was wrong. They rose in hasty golden whirls from the sandalwoods, swirled like smoke, dashed back to the flowers for additional honey, but were too agitated to gather it. Startlingly, flights of birds flashed down the watercourse, calling loudly, and other birds rose from grass and bushes to join them.

At the same instant a sound like far thunder that did not end reached the old kangaroo above the boom of the storm and the nearer rustling of the grass and the little sounds of leaves. He rose ponderously to hocks and hands, then lifted himself to his full height to look about the sunny world. Grain-like grass shone, hair-stemmed bluebells swayed, and the terrific darkness of the southern sky was greater. But for a moment he saw nothing odd save the wildness of the birds and insects.

Then, towards the south, a wildly-curling yellowish wall appeared, writhingly laced with white and darkened by tossed rubbish: a strange thing leaping, falling upon itself, and swiftly advancing. Flash floods he had seen, but never anything like this; he did not know what it was. Although he had fed

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beside the earthen dam at the foot of the hills and had even noted the cracks in its face, he had no knowledge of the effect of cloudbursts upon dams—or of what a breaking dam might do. He knew only that the roar shouted danger. He thumped warning to his does, and they leapt up from the sand and leaves, looking about them as he had. With a final bang, he set off ponderously for higher ground, driving his harem before him.

The doe, whose son had been in the burrs, moved with odd twitches and wriggles of rage because her hastily-pocketed offspring still pricked her.

From up the watercourse, the wall of water sped towards them, fanning, falling, rumbling, tossing logs and tree trunks in its surf. The does reached the bank and scrambled up. But the old man was betrayed both by his courage and his dignity.

From the morning of the world, as kangaroo mobs had fled, the old man of the group had brought up the rear, placing himself between the does and danger, turning at intervals, drawn to full height and with chest expanded, to face the foe, proudly thumping the ground to proclaim masterhood.

That the flood would be neither impressed nor delayed was something with which the old man did not reckon. Beautiful as a golden statue, he was striking a posture as the first wild wave of water rushed round his legs. He stood even taller—and thus on poorer balance—as the churning surf struck him, throwing him backwards and sprawling him in mud and spray. Then he was out of his depth and swept with the current.

Across the wildly-pulling yellow tide, he had a last glimpse of his does waiting, bewildered, on the bank. Eddies ducked him. A bawling and wild-eyed steer swept past. Fledgling birds floundered pathetically among racked leaves. A terrified hedgehog stared about with beady eyes. Flotsam and submerged rubbish threatened to drown the old man by forcing him under.

Amazed and choking, he clutched at a log, and the current tugged his submerged fur and pulled like a giant at his legs and tail. Whirlpools spun him round. His log collided with others.

As he tried to draw himself higher from the water, his log rolled and ducked him; soon he would have drowned had not a great mass of grass roots and sticks from the dam whose breaking had caused the catastrophe, surged round his tree and about and under him, entangling him but preventing him from sinking. Scuffling weakly in the rooty mass, he was swept downstream.

Shortly after dark, his log and massed rubbish grounded as the flood spent itself in a vast box flat. Getting free further exhausted him, so that as he finally emerged on a blue-grass slope, his tail dragged and he was swaying drunkenly on hocks,

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tail, and hands, then fell panting on the softness of the grass.

About him, the box trees were black against the stars, whispering in faint airs. Far away to the north-west a dingo howled—and another answered it. The old man got up heavily, swaying. For himself he was not afraid of the wild dogs; they had too much respect for his embrace and his ability to use his hind toes as disembowelling knives, but his does and joeys were another matter. If attacked by dingoes while alone they would panic, heckled now by one dog, now by another, until pulled down.

Scratched, stiff, and sodden, the old man started back along the watercourse, following the dusty ribbon of a cattle-path. Although the rush of water from the bursting dam was gone, the channels were still flowing strongly from the great rain in the hills, and he was on the wrong side of the watercourse. But he would solve the problem of crossing when opposite his does.

Meantime he went doggedly up the path, hopping leadenly, stumbling over small obstructions, and lurching against bushes and tree trunks. At the edge of hearing, the dingoes howled.

The old man possessed much more intelligence than was commonly credited to him. The unexpected might confuse him, but he reasoned clearly about the doings of the wilderness; he knew the dogs were a female with a grown litter and her mate.

The old dogs would be teaching the young ones to hunt: showing them how to frighten sheep so that they bunched; then demonstrating how to dart in, race across the woolly backs, and slash the stupid throats; teaching the method of pulling down a calf and dodging the attack of the maddened cow—and preparing to show how to deal with racing doe kangaroos.

Whenever the old man stopped to rest the voices of the dingo pack, still far away but slowly moving up the opposite side of the watercourse, would startle him to his feet again. He had to be back with his does and joeys before the dingoes found them.

By dawn, he who could cover fifteen feet at a bound and, if pressed, go over a six-foot dog fence, was plodding upon hands, hoppers, and tail, his heart thumping as if he had been racing. The one good thing was that the dogs were still some miles from the does and would now bed down in thick scrub or hollow logs until evening. Before evening, the last run-off water from the hills should be gone, and he would be back in familiar territory and able to cross the watercourse and rejoin his flock.

For the first time since he had heard the dingoes, he began to browse—snapping off a wild lily flower with his hands and enjoying its honey, biting off the heads of blue cornflowers, questing with nose and lips for the tender new shoots of the kangaroo grass, or enjoying its sun-cured hay. For perhaps an

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hour he fed in the early sun, then he stretched out in a patch of wild hop bushes and slept the sleep of the exhausted . . .

He woke refreshed, to experience a shock of anxiety. For he had slept long, and the sun was golden with afternoon while the parrot flocks were heading home across the sky. Emerging from the hop bushes, he set off up the path again and, his stiffness having passed, was moving with his usual rhythmic and rubbery spring when rounding a bee-buzzing clump of sandalwoods he confronted his enemy, the young master of the rival 'roo mob.

Both kangaroos checked abruptly, and rose to their extreme height on toe-tips and the lower curve of their tails. Both bent slightly backward with expanded chests and elbows belligerently out from their sides. Their delicately-veined ears funnelled forward and their nostrils dilated. Then they froze, motionless and malely assertive, as poised as ballerinas; each waited for the other to clear the way and, as neither moved, quivered with rage.

The old man thumped and suddenly advanced his left foot until its polished reaper just touched that of his opponent's right foot. Too quickly for the eye to follow it, the younger male moved his left foot to touch the old man's right. The superb flatness and velvet coats of their stomachs brushed. They leaned farther backward and stood even taller.

The old man was the heavier of the two, but the younger male was as tall, and youth was on his side. His breathing rate had not increased from the strain of the toe-tip pose, while the old man was breathing heavily. The old man's muscles were battle-scarred here and there—a lumping of the great tendon of the right leg where an eagle had slashed him, a ridging of the chest muscles over the heart where a bullet had grazed, a small deformity of the left hand where a leaping dog had fastened its teeth before he disembowelled it. He was neither so quick nor so lithe as he had been—and the kangaroo before him was a superb animal, silk-muscled, long-winded, and ready at last to prove his strength. The old man was worried: he wanted to go home. He made a gesture of conciliation, dropping back on his hocks and turning slightly to pass round the younger male.

Normally the gesture would have been accepted, both kangaroos going about their business. But the younger male was naturally bad-tempered. To him an offer of peace was an admission of fear. Leaning forward, he cuffed the old man ringingly on the ear with his right hand, on the chin with his left, and at the same moment kicked him in the stomach. The old kangaroo reared up as the young one leapt back. Both animals' eyes were red now, but the old man still wanted to go

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home. Angry and with his ears ringing, he turned again to pass.

The younger male sprang at him, locked his arms about him, and raked him cruelly with a down-blow of his great toe from hip to hock. The old man's heart pounded, heat of outrage filled his body and throbbed in his head. He whirled, raining cuffing blows, and grappled with his opponent.

Locked together, they swayed as wrestlers. High on toes and strong-arched tails, they spun like dancers, each trying to embrace his adversary's upper body while getting the reaping hook of his own hind claw into the opponent's belly. Feeling the young kangaroo's strength, the old man knew confused amazement, for the animal with which he grappled was stronger than he. Exerting his own force, he found it insufficient, so that he could neither break the young male's grip nor fling him sideways. Only the battle experience of his footwork and his knowledge of how to use his weight was keeping him on his feet.

Of all his fights this was proving the most dangerous. With cold awareness, he felt that it was perhaps the one from which he would not go home. He fought to get his shoulder under his opponent's chin to jerk his head back. But the young 'roo ducked his own head under the old man's chin, threatening to choke him by the pressure on his throat.

Their colliding shanks rang. Their feet tore the dust and their bracing tails made great skid marks as clawing hands ripped fluff from velvet shoulders. Their thumping tread was loud in the silence of the bush. They writhed and grunted with heaving chests, each waiting for the lightning flash of advantage that would let him get his foot up.

Then the old man missed his step and was back from the younger 'roo while the young 'roo still held his shoulders. The young 'roo's foot struck like the jab of a blunt spear at the cleft of the ribs and pried for entry.

A dog or a man in such a situation would have been instantly disembowelled, but the old man's hide was the world's finest boot-leather and his stomach was flat-tight as a muscled drum. Feeling the young 'roo's foot, he drew in his stomach and leant forward so that the deadly claw was prying at a surface that sloped away from it—the claw slipped gallingly without cutting.

At the same moment, the old man threw his weight sideways, so that his attacker went off balance. Savagely grappling, they tripped over an ant-hill and were down in the grass, then up again, still holding. Both grunted and whistled for breath, but the old man was the worse winded and he was growing dizzy from the thudding of his heart. Suddenly tricking the young 'roo through superior footwork, he got his foot into ripping position in

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the young male's chest, rotating the foot slightly to raise a betraying ridge of velvet-furred and leathery skin into which the deadly claw could cut.

Infuriated by the pain of the kick, the young 'roo thrust forward instead of withdrawing. The old man dropped his embrace from the young giant's shoulders to his upper chest, and at the same instant his reaping toe had the purchase it needed in a fold of hide. If he could have used his full power, the battle would have been his—but the old injury to his great tendon betrayed him. His down-stroke wobbled and slid, and the young 'roo had him moving backwards to be pinned against a box trunk, the force of the rush striking his head against the tree trunk. Half stunned, the old man lost his grip.

The young 'roo, snickering murder, brought up his legs, stabbing against the vulnerable hollow where the ribs parted. Because of the tree, the old man could not withdraw. He fought to throw his attacker sideways, keeping him just enough off balance to prevent the questing and terrible toe from starting its down-rip. But he could not continue to keep the young 'roo off balance . . .

From the whirling dizziness of exhaustion, he saw a mental image of his does attacked by the ranging dingo pack—scattered, confused, and fleeing; does bounding blindly with flanks ripped now by this dog, now by that; does pulled down and trying vainly to save their throats with small dark hands. The pictures, wild, sudden, uncomprehended, meant one thing to him: *he must go home.*

But in his way was this grunting, strong-smelling, assailing thing. Rage such as he had never known reddened his vision. He pushed and hurled sideways. The attacker's foot slipped from his belly. Hugging, he shook the younger male so that his head jerked on his shoulders. He clawed and kicked and cuffed, driving the young kangaroo backwards against the sandalwoods. He landed kick after kick in the young 'roo's stomach, leaving burning weals.

Fear was in the young 'roo's eyes. For, given time to plant his good toe in a fold of skin, the old man could kill the younger 'roo and the younger 'roo knew it . . . But the old man had to go home and was late.

Landing a last rain of blows and kicks, he flung the younger 'roo backwards into the sandalwoods. For a moment he stood very tall on toes and tail, snorting and licking his upper arms. Then he turned abruptly and went on with dignity up the cattle path.

Emerging bruised and bleeding from the sandalwoods, the

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young 'roo staggered to his feet. He was astonished, badly whipped, and badly frightened. Like all natural bullies, he took it out on someone else by cuffing and terrorizing his does as he drove them before him down the watercourse. He had decided to return to his previous feeding-grounds in the great box flat where the flood had spent itself. In future he would give the old kangaroo a wide berth.

Sunset was reddening beyond the flowering sandalwoods as the old man crossed the last shallow channel and came out where he had left his flock. He snickered and thumped loudly, and frightened does came bounding out of the dusk to crowd about him. Several of his favourite wives clutched his fur and nuzzled against him. A joey charged between his legs. He boxed their ears and cheeks for over-familiarity and sat very tall, looking about him, a benevolent despot, pale gold in the last light. Then he thumped warning and the flock was still as the two old dingoes followed by the grown pups slipped from the kangaroo grass and dropped silently on their haunches to regard the kangaroos.

The old man hopped purposefully towards them, drew himself to his greatest height, and thumped. The dogs looked at him thoughtfully, pink tongues lolling. He pranced on toe-tips and the extremest inches of his tail—and, as suddenly as they had come, the dogs faded back into the grass. Five minutes later they raised a rabbit in the hop scrub to the east.

The old man remained poised as their voices faded. Then he sat back on his hocks to begin the proper licking of his shoulder and upper arms. About him, his does began to feed and play happily. The mother of the joey that had fallen into the burrs lifted out her offspring, expressed an adverse opinion of him, and resumed the hunt for the last burr stickers in her pouch.

The world was normal again and sweet with the scents of dry grass and wet earth and lilies. Overhead, the legion stars of the dry country came out, and on the bank, the does began to feed leisurely, wandering up the watercourse towards the wild lily flats. The old man scratched his ear with the side-claw of his hind foot; then, bruised, scratched, and stiff, but happy, he stretched lazily and settled down to sleep.

★ ★ ★

OFF THE RECORD

Disk jockey: *a man who lives on spins and needles.*

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CODE WORD

Maung Tin searched desperately for a warning that would not betray him

BY NIGEL GROOM

MAUNG TIN knew he would have to find a safe hiding-place where they could rest. For himself he could easily go on —get out, perhaps, in another fortnight or so if the jungle north wasn't too thick. But they were running out of food and the airman was getting weaker every day.

After days of wading through the low, swampy, leech-ridden, mosquito-infested river jungle they were now climbing up into the hills, weaving through gnarled creepers under the gloomy shade of huge teak trees, hacking a path through thorn and bamboo. The airman's young, freckled face had blistered and reddened and grown haggard. He leant on Maung Tin's shoulder, clutching at his frayed shirt and longyi, panting heavily, his mud-caked flying boots dragging along the ground. He seemed to have ceased to care what was happening to him.

"It's no use, Johnny," he muttered, "you shouldn't have taken me on. I can't make it any more. Ought to have stayed by the plane and been captured."

Maung Tin understood nothing of what was said but he smiled and patted the man on the back. "I'm a Karen, bojee," he said proudly in his own language. "Your plane hits the ground before me. You step out. No Karen deserts an Englishman so entrusted to him."

"Leave me alone, you pug-ugly, slit-eyed, yellow-faced little guardian angel," the airman went on. "Let me crawl off and die. I'm a goner, Johnny, I'm a goner." He raised his voice almost to a shout.

Maung Tin placed his fingers in front of his mouth imploring silence, cupped a hand behind his ear, then slid his thumb sideways across his neck.

"Let them cut my throat, Johnny," the airman said, catching his meaning, but he became silent again.

They had spoken to no one but each other since they started, for Maung Tin knew the risks and kept away from roads and villages. A European could not be disguised in Burma and must

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therefore be kept completely out of sight. They walked by day, inching cautiously through the forest, and hid at nights in mosquito-haunted thickets.

Their progress was mostly silent, for they could communicate only in sign language, but at times they talked meaninglessly to each other to keep their spirits up. As long as the airman was fresh and eager this system worked well enough, but Maung Tin knew that it was no longer sufficient. He wanted to encourage, to give the man hope, to make him believe there was a chance. If he could joke it might suffice. But without a common language he could do no more, and he feared that the airman would die.

The track led upwards steeply. It had been unused for some time and in his free hand Maung Tin held his dah and slashed the overhanging creepers aside with its razor-sharp edge.

As they reached a saddle the path widened and then opened into a small clearing. Maung Tin pulled the airman to the ground with him and, eyes blinking in the sudden sharp sunlight, they peered through the thick foliage.

In front of them was a small timber house raised up, like many of the buildings in Burma, on teak stilts. A dark green creeper snaked over one side of the building, bamboo shoots strutted through the wooden steps leading up to the verandah, and a red splash of untended bougainvillaea draped the front timbers.

Tensely they watched a pair of hornbills settle on the verandah rail, preen each other, and then flap lazily into a tree. The birds reassured Maung Tin that the place was empty, but he could take no chances. Gesticulating to the airman to stay where he was, the little man of the jungle slid without a sound into the foliage for a further survey.

The house, he saw, must have been built for touring Government officers or employees of the teak companies. It had been unused for some time and the jungle was stretching in, but the timbers were still solid and the roof was sound. There could be few better places for the airman to rest in, and by the time he returned Maung Tin had already worked out his plan.

"Come, with me, bojee," he said, helping the airman to his feet. "This is a good place, bojee. We can sleep here until we are stronger. I will go and find food and water and bring them to you. You lie here until I come back. This is a fine place. Come bojee, the Grand Hotel, the Grand Hotel."

Maung Tin was thinking of the undoubted comforts of that palatial building on the water's edge in Rangoon that he had once seen from a sampan.

The airman looked up and suddenly, unexpectedly, laughed. "Grand Hotel! You're speaking English at last, Johnny. Grand

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Hotel. Now where in the heck did you learn that one?"

"Grand Hotel," the Englishman knew and understood the words. He had laughed at the joke, the first laugh for many days. Perhaps he still had a spark of hope left. Maung Tin grinned at his comrade, trying to fan the spark. Still grinning, he picked up the canvas pack which had sustained them both with food and medicines, grasped the belt with the revolver and ammunition and his own cloth bundle that had contained rice, and took the airman's arm.

They walked up to the front of the house. But as the airman put his foot on the wooden steps Maung Tin pulled him back.

"No, not there." He shook his head wildly. "Not there," he repeated in Karen-ni to the blank, confused expression on the man's face. "The Japanese may follow our tracks. Or someone may come and find us here. Even in this place we must hide. We shall live underneath. If you could only understand."

The cavernous area under the floor of the house between the stilts was filled with long baulks of rough timber, intended for another building and stored there out of the monsoon rains. Maung Tin led the airman round to the back and they entered a gap in the untidy piles of wood which admitted them to a small, gloomy chamber walled almost to the ceiling by the timber.

The airman sank down, silent and shaking feverishly, his head cupped in his hands, the spark of hope no longer visible.

Maung Tin glanced at him with a feeling of alarm, but there was no time to waste. He started to heave at the logs and planks, lifting them away from one wall. His tired muscles strained with the exertion, and beads of sweat washed the salt from his forehead into his eyes until they stung with the pain of it. He watched alertly for snakes that might lie concealed in the timber, and every few minutes he would stop and peer cautiously out into the sunlight, scanning the forest.

The work took an hour. At the end of it he had replaced the timber wall, leaving behind it a small hiding-place just large enough for both of them to lie in, and approached by a short tunnel through the wood.

Maung Tin left the house with a great feeling of relief. Not only was the airman safely concealed but also he could himself move freely and quickly, encumbered neither by the man's presence nor by the weight of his equipment. He carried only his dah in its crude leather sheath, a cloth to wrap food, and a goatskin for water.

He moved downhill and soon struck a used track that wound tortuously out of the jungle into a narrow valley of terraced paddy fields. He followed its course until, rounding a bluff, he found

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himself confronting a small hamlet of bamboo-and-wattle shacks clustered near a well. There was a smell of woodfires burning and curries cooking, and by the well men were squatting on the ground talking.

A dog ran out from a hut, growling and baring its teeth at him. The group by the well looked up. Silently cursing the wretched animal he walked towards them with a nonchalant air.

He noticed the green uniforms at once. Four of the men wore them—Burmans, like most of the people there. At least they would be easier to deal with than Japanese. He wished he knew what the uniforms represented; there were so many uniforms these days.

"I seek water and food for a journey," Maung Tin said in Burmese after a long silence.

"You are welcome, stranger," replied an old man whom he took from his air of authority to be the headman. "We have little, but you shall eat in my house."

"I would eat with you most gladly," Maung Tin said, "but I have a sick companion, and wish to take a meal to him. Also I want food for several days. I will buy what you can spare."

"Where are you travelling to?" The tall Burman in uniform was smiling, but the question was staccato.

"From the fighting," Maung Tin lied. "We flee from the war."

"Have you travelled far?"

"For many days, so many that I have forgotten the number."

"You look and speak like a Karen."

"Yes."

"What does a Karen do so far from his country, and travelling when most men stay in their villages?"

"I run from the trouble. I am a man of peace."

"Your companion, is he a Karen?"

"Yes."

Another of the uniformed men interposed. He bore the marks of a rank on his sleeve and Maung Tin observed that his tunic, besides being too large, was holed and bloodstained, as if pulled from a corpse.

"We will help you," the man said, looking at the ground. "Give us money and we will provide all the food you need and help you to carry it to your friend. Where have you left him?"

From the tone of voice and the nature of the questions Maung Tin knew that he was under suspicion, and forced his exhausted frame into alertness.

"Where have you left him?" the man repeated blandly.

There was a grizzled, bearded Sikh squatting bare-chested

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behind the soldiers, and his eyes stared straight into Maung Tin's. Almost imperceptibly the Sikh was shaking his head, while his lips mouthed, "No," in silence.

Maung Tin caught the warning which confirmed his own fears. Immediate escape was out of the question. He must stall.

"I cannot describe the place; it is much as any other," he said at last, as unconcernedly as he could, "but I will lead you to it."

"We will go at once. Come. Give me your money. Kyan Dun will find you rice and some dried fish. Fill your waterskin, then we will be off."

Maung Tin started up the valley he had just descended, the four Burmans in green uniform keeping close to him, with their carbines loaded and held at the ready. The weight of the waterskin and the rice bag was considerable. Maung Tin suspected he had been allowed to take them as much to hamper his own movements as to prevent his guessing the intentions of his companions. He made no attempt to move off the pathway he had used before, for the dust showed his footmarks clearly. He walked slowly, edging as near as possible to the youngest of his escort, a mere boy. The boy, he guessed, had no suspicion of the plot. At least he was more likely than the others to talk.

"Are there Japanese round here?" By speaking softly he made sure that only the boy would hear.

"Their patrols pass this way from time to time," the youth replied guardedly.

"The English soldiers, have they been here?"

"They passed near in the retreat, where the motor road goes north. They have not come back, but . . ." The boy hesitated.

"But what?"

"Have you heard of the men with the Chindit sign?"

"No." Maung Tin willed the boy to say more.

"There are many of them."

"Where? We must take care to avoid them."

"Two days north, near Pyon Chauk, they say such men have dropped from the sky wearing the badges of a Chindit, the guardian of the temple."

"We shall avoid them, for we go south," Maung Tin said.

They were reaching the head of the valley and entering the jungle. Soon he knew he must make his attempt. The pathway narrowed, compelling them to walk in single file.

"We Karens like the gibbon," Maung Tin said loudly. "If I see one I will try, with your permission, to kill it. The meat is good and we have eaten little meat these last few days."

There was a large, heavily-branched tree he had passed on his

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way down, set back from the path and festooned with these grey monkeys. They reached it a short while later. The monkeys swarmed over it, a hundred or more of them jumping wildly from branch to branch, chattering and screaming at the strangers.

"Can I borrow your gun a moment?" The young Burman, already aghast at the declared intention of their prisoner, released his grasp. Before any protest could be uttered by those behind him, Maung Tin had aimed and fired. A rattle of shots spattered the tree and a grey corpse slithered from the branches.

Maung Tin braced himself to show no hurry. "A fine shot, my friends, and a good gun. A moment while I fetch the dead one." He spoke in the instant of stunned silence when both the men behind him and the animals in the tree were nonplussed.

As he walked forward the monkeys recovered and burst into a caterwaul of fear and fury, hurling themselves in panic from branch to branch and down to the ground. The noise caused the Burmans to hesitate further. Maung Tin started to run, the gun smoking in his hand, the wriggling grey forms thudding round him. He had passed the trunk of the tree and reached the thick blanket of foliage beyond it before his escort fired.

He had taken care to make his flight in the opposite direction to the rest-house. In the thickness of the jungle it needed very little distance between himself and his pursuers before he would be untraceable. From the first mad rush he slowed into a noiseless stealthy tread, changed direction, then waited in breathless silence. There was no sound of pursuit. He started to slither, snake-like, on a wide course back to his English companion.

He would have liked to move off that night, exhausted though he was, but the airman would probably have had to be carried. Twenty miles to go, if what the young Burman had said was true. Two days, if they could keep clear of Japanese. The last bit would be hard, with the Japanese armies to pass, the British sentries to find and attract.

No. Better accept the risks of a day or two of rest, and tackle the last stage fresh. If the airman wasn't better by then, well, it would be a bigger risk still, but Maung Tin's back was strong.

As with all jungle-dwellers his sense of direction was instinctive and his movements automatic. But so great was his exhaustion that his thoughts began to be distracted from his surroundings.

His mind played with the anticipation of a prolonged sleep.

As he reached the house he noticed too late the flash of jungle-green uniform pouncing on him.

He closed his eyes, sagged, and dropped as a steel-like arm gripped his neck from behind and dragged him away. He felt his feet bumping up the wooden steps of the building. He was

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powerless to struggle and awaited with resignation the bullet or the swish of a descending dah that would end his life.

But there was no oblivion.

The grip round his neck relaxed and he collapsed on the floor, feigning unconsciousness. There were voices speaking softly. He tried to hear what was being said and realized with a shock that his captors were not speaking Burmese at all.

So that was it. The young Burman had told him Japanese patrols passed this way. He fought off his dizziness and assumed again the cunning wariness of a hunted animal. He had no doubt who his captors were and no illusions about his fate.

Perhaps the airman had already been found, in which case death was but a matter of time. But perhaps the airman still lay there, hearing the boots of the Japanese above his head, if he wasn't unconscious with fever. He would be waiting for Maung Tin's return. He might do something foolish to stop that return, unaware that Maung Tin could never come back.

No use trying to argue a way out with excuses, even if any of them understood Burmese. The Japanese must have heard the shooting. His gun was still warm and the Burman traitors would soon come, if they were not here already.

There was only one course of action. He must let the airman know where he was and what had happened. Perhaps the man could go on alone, or perhaps the English soldiers would come this way—slender chances, but there was nothing else to hope for.

He racked his brain, searching desperately for a warning the airman would understand—that would not betray him to the Japanese. A code word. There was only one he could think of.

He tensed his lungs and suddenly, like a man in the throes of a nightmare, shouted through the floor-boards, " Grand Hotel! Grand Hotel! "

The noise reverberated round the wooden walls. An arm gripped him tightly. A voice behind him said, " Blimey! "

Another, angrier one said, " Keep quiet, Johnny."

Johnny! Neither voice was the airman's, but with a start Maung Tin recognized the familiar word.

He opened his eyes.

The arm close to his face was that of a European. Above the flesh was a rolled-up sleeve of jungle green, and on the sleeve a picture of a Chindit.

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TIE UP A GOAT

GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

"BUT suppose," she insisted, "that it had been meant for us."

"I do not follow you, my dear aunt," he answered.

"Charles, you are not to be deliberately stupid! Suppose the parcel had been meant to kill one of us."

He laid down his evening paper.

"We do not know it was a parcel."

"Of course we do."

"I mean, we do not know it was a booby-trap. It might have been anything. It might have been a packet of detonators which some damned fool sent through the post and the postman had put in his pocket. It might have been for an address farther down the street, or for next door."

"Which next door?"

"I cannot guess."

"But if it was meant for next door, what was it?"

"Dear Aunt Georgina, how the devil do I know? Like all women you have a tendency to argue when there is no evidence to argue from."

"And you, Charles," she retorted, "because the evidence was removed in an ambulance, try to believe it was never there at all."

Georgina Dennim strode out of the room. She had the height and the genial, positive manners of a retired general. When she wore a bowler hat and riding breeches she could almost pass as one. At the riding school where she was assistant mistress she had occasionally been addressed by new pupils as "sir." But never twice.

Charles Dennim was at last able to resume his paper and the

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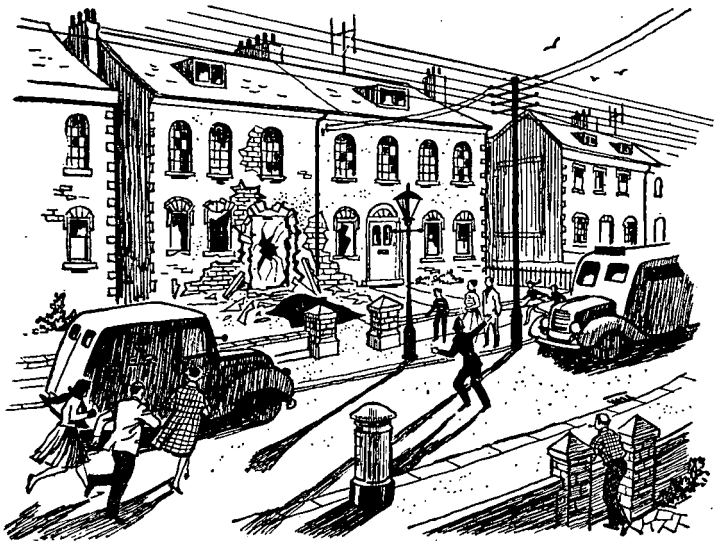

quiet suppression of his own horrified disgust. That was a practice to which he had been accustomed by war and by the long years of living with his memories.

It was difficult to reconstruct what had happened. One might as well attempt to reconstruct the postman. A little before eleven he had been alone—thank God!—in the house, and had heard the double knock at the front door. It was a warm morning in late May, and the windows of his office at the back of the house were wide open. Before leaving the room he had closed them to prevent the fresh west wind blowing his papers off the desk. There was a delay of another half minute while the catch of the french window gave trouble. When at last he walked up the passage to the front door, it had disintegrated in front of him.

That was his first impression—through the eyes. Though he was only some fifteen feet away from the door, he could swear that he had seen it begin to separate into its original planks before he was conscious of noise and vapour.

The lock had jammed and there was enough door left—except around the letter-box—to obstruct the way out. He jumped into the dining-room and out through its now glassless window. On the path lay the upper and lower halves of the postman joined together, if one could call it joined, by the local effects of the explosion.

The red Post Office van stood at the gate. The suburban street was filling with people, mostly women. The more sensitive stood

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at his garden gate only for a moment. The rest stayed to stare, gradually infiltrating into the garden. None of them approached the postman. It was so obvious that he needed no help.

Dennim, finding nothing nearer to his hand, tore down one of the dining-room curtains with a nervous jerk, and covered the body. He replied to questions that he did not know, that he had not seen, that he could not explain. He vaguely expected some sort of hostile demonstration. Of course there was none. The horrified little crowd assumed that the postman's death was meaningless as a road accident.

At last a policeman arrived; then, with astonishing speed, a patrol car, and shortly after it a car from the police station of his London suburb. They handled the gaping women, the body, and the search for every scrap of paper from the presumed parcel like a team of well-trained, fatherly sheep-dogs.

Dennim disliked both them and their uniforms. He knew it was absurd to resent being forced into the obedience of a sheep on an occasion when one could be nothing else, yet he was aware of a coldness in his voice as he answered the quick, courteous questions. He could see that they put it down to a combination of shock and reserve.

The ambulance came and went. A policeman was posted on the front gate. Dennim himself was offered a lift to the station.

Once in the Superintendent's office, Dennim was more at ease. The face above the uniform was that of a hard-worked accountant or civil servant. He was glad to see a sensible and kindly man of about his own age.

The Superintendent made it plain at once that he thought Charles Dennim the intended victim of the explosion and in no way responsible for it.

"You know of no motive, Mr. Dennim? No enemies at all?"

"None."

"Any domestic cause which could help us?"

"You mean a jealous husband or something of that sort?"

"Just any irregularity," said the Superintendent.

"Not on my part. And I am certain you can rule out my aunt."

"She is unmarried?"

"A widow—and of very sane and determined character. But no doubt you will wish to get your own impression of her."

"Have you any theory as to what actually happened, Mr. Dennim?"

"Well, the parcel was presumably meant to go off when the string was undone or the lid lifted."

"You suggest the postman tampered with it?"

"Certainly not. When I did not answer his knock, I think he may have tried to push the parcel through my letter-box. It has a bigger opening than is usual. A good-sized book, for example, will go in. I suggest that the parcel jammed, which might have broken the acid container or released the spring of the trigger

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device. Personally I do not believe the parcel was meant for me or my aunt at all."

"But you said your letter-box set it off."

"I think it must have been delivered in error. Either the sender got the house number wrong or the postman made a mistake. The street was correct, because that bit of brown paper which I found blowing about showed the last half of the name."

"What do you know of your next-door neighbours?"

"Nothing. What does one know in London? We say good morning, and comment on the tulips."

"What exactly do you do, Mr. Dennim?"

"I have a very specialized knowledge of the noble families of Central Europe and of heraldry. I act as a consultant genealogist. I have been employed on the revision of the Almanach de Gotha, and I contribute to a number of learned periodicals. It is not very profitable, but enough. And my aunt has a small income of her own."

"In your business as a genealogist you have not come across anything which could provide a motive for putting you out of the way?"

"Not a thing."

"I'd like to turn to your war service for a moment, Mr. Dennim. I gather you were in some branch of Intelligence. You are sure there is no motive there?"

"I cannot imagine one."

"Would you care to tell me more?"

"Superintendent, there will be a file about me somewhere. I do not know where, nor who is now responsible for the work I did. Scotland Yard might know. Whatever they tell you—if they can tell you anything—I would ask you to keep to yourself."

"This is a case of murder, Mr. Dennim," the Superintendent reminded him.

"I understand. Yes. But imagine for a moment that I had a past—well, not criminal but liable to be exaggerated. I would not like it to be all over the district and in the papers because a postman was killed at my front door. I still do not think the parcel had anything to do with me."

"You will have to answer a lot more questions before we are sure of that," said the Superintendent, getting up to open the door for him.

Dennim's self-possession faltered at the sight of half a dozen newspapermen in and around the entrance to the station.

"Look here, what on earth am I to say to those fellows?"

"There is not much I can teach you about keeping information to yourself," the Superintendent answered drily—and was disconcerted by the smile which suddenly lit up the fine-drawn, courteous face of his visitor and made it ten years younger.

"Just because you, sir, have been kind enough to allow it. But they won't."

"I can only advise you not to make a mystery of yourself."

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In fact, it had all been very easy. He had played the part of a dull specialist in a dull profession who knew nothing, had noticed nothing, and was outraged that there should have been anything out of the ordinary to notice. The evening papers showed that he had taken in their representatives completely. What he had said was not quotable, either for its inanity or for any intelligent conjecture. A genealogist living quietly with his aunt was not news.

For the next two days nothing happened. Passers-by stared curiously at the house and at the builders who were repairing the front door and the windows. The Superintendent telephoned once for no obvious reason. Dennim stolidly continued to work in his study. Georgina, jodhpured and tweed-coated, strode off each morning to the riding school, her straight figure disapproving the vulgarity of crime and its publicity. She only once approached the subject, and that obliquely—for she was not a woman to lay herself open to a second snub even from her intimates.

"It may interest you, Charles," she said, "that there is a new municipal sweeper on this road, whose face I do not know."

"Very observant of you, my dear. There is another plain-clothes policeman continually engaged in changing all four wheels of his car at the corner of Acacia Avenue."

"They seem to think you are in need of protection."

"My own theory, Aunt Georgi, is that they suspect you of posting parcels to me."

"Pah! Fact is—they don't know any more than we do."

The next morning, which was the third from the explosion, Dennim received a message from the Superintendent requesting him to call at the station. The Superintendent received him with an air of discreet detachment, and told him he was expected at Flat 66, Singleton Court, Kensington, at five-thirty that evening.

"For whom shall I ask?" Dennim inquired.

"They didn't tell me. Doesn't the address mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, it's all above board. I was instructed by headquarters not to write or telephone the message to you, but to give it in person."

"Very well. Pass it back to them that I will be there."

"Would you like a car?"

"No. I have a feeling, Superintendent, that I should be on foot and alone."

"Eh? Well, maybe you're right. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Dennim, that if our regular customers had the sense not to use a car and not to trust a mate we should have the devil of a job to lay our hands on 'em . . ."

Singleton Court was a huge, red-brick block of small flats, built in the middle nineteen-thirties—a regular warren of holes for outwardly-respectable rabbits. Not even a continental concièrge, Dennim thought as he wandered along the heavily-carpeted

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passages looking for No. 66, could have reported accurately the movements, tastes, and professions behind such an architect's fever-dream of white-painted, closed front doors.

He rang the bell of No. 66. The door opened at once.

At the sight of the man facing him Charles Dennim felt a curious mixture of affection and repulsion. He was carried back thirteen years into a period of his life which had become mercifully unreal. He resented the memories which the man brought to life, yet dearly loved and trusted him.

The strained, thin face which smiled in the doorway—a face which had once given the impression of lank, black hair and office-white skin as marked as a waiter's uniform—had meant to him such personal safety as he could have; and, still more important, safety for his honour and reputation. Its black and white were now muddled by grey hair and sun-tan, and the thin mouth which had been too tense, even for a soldier, had relaxed.

"Ian!" he exclaimed, and held out his hand.

"My dear Karl! You haven't changed a bit. Just as deceptively quiet as ever."

"I am so glad to see you," Dennim answered almost primly. "I did not know whom I might find. And explanations are so difficult. Are you still at the game?"

"No. Just a farmer. I'm here because I know more about you than anyone else. Tell me, Karl, were you followed?"

"Yes—till I got out of the Underground at South Kensington."

"Description?"

"A not-very-experienced detective constable of the Metropolitan Police—at a guess."

Colonel Ian Parrow laughed with evident relief.

"You mustn't expect too much of them. After all, that's the only Underground they know. Come on in. I want to introduce you to a man you will like."

"Who is he?" Dennim asked as the door closed behind him.

The passage and the glimpse of an interior decorator's bedroom beyond told him all he wanted to know about the flat. It was not lived in. It was used as a discreet address.

"Admiral Cunobel."

"He is still alive then?"

"He's only seventy-two, my lad. They brought him back temporarily when they couldn't find anyone else to direct the Department. All the wartime bunch have gone to Kenya or retired to Tangier or gone into the Church or something."

"How is he?"

"Reckless, they say. But we aren't the men our fathers were—especially civil servants."

Dennim knew a good deal of the Admiral's exploits in the First War. There was no longer any secret about them; his name had turned up in too many memoirs of the time. To put him in charge again of some of the discreeter activities of the State was simple and effective. Everyone knew that he was always

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paddling about on the edge. Nobody would suspect that at his age he might be in command.

"What did he do in the last war?" Dennim asked.

"He was chosen to lead the Resistance in southern England if the German invasion had come off. When it didn't, he was just used to interview and select personnel. And the more you think of it, the more important that is. He was never in our branch, only in Security."

The Admiral was sitting on the desk in the living-room with a tumbler of pink gin beside him. He resembled a young tortoise eagerly exploring new sources of food. The beak, the jowls, and the leathery skin were unmistakable tortoise, but the sprightliness of pale blue eyes and dark blue suit suggested that lettuce was in the offing, and good lettuce at that.

Colonel Parrow introduced his friend, "Graf Karl von Dennim —Admiral Cunobel." Dennim had been expecting some slight embarrassment till the true nature of his past had been established. It would not have surprised him if the Admiral had, for the moment, omitted to shake his hand. But the old man jumped off his desk with enthusiastic cordiality.

"Delighted to meet you, my boy! As a matter of fact, we have met before."

"I ought to remember, sir, but— "

"No, you oughtn't! You were two weeks old. That was in Vienna in 1912. Your grandmother, the Princess, was extraordinarily kind to me. Assistant Naval Attaché, I was. Those were the days, my lad! None of this nationalism except among the lower classes. A man chose the side he would play for like a county cricketer. County of birth or county of residence—whichever he pleased, but he had to stick to it. There was your Uncle Willi fighting for the Tsar in the Imperial Guards, and your Uncle Fritz who called himself a Bavarian and was killed before Verdun. And Hildegard who married a Greek and nearly got shot by both sides for helping prisoners to escape. And Georgina, the tall one, who married her second cousin, the English Dennim. Charming boy, he was. Good lord, he'd be seventy-three now if he hadn't been killed on the Somme."

"Aunt Georgina lives with me."

"No? The divine Georgi! By Jove, we must all dine together when this business is over. Now, you tell me all about yourself. I've no faith in files. I like to know. Hitler in Vienna! Lord, what your grandparents would have thought! You too, I suppose?"

"Yes. My loyalty was to anyone who could save Austria from the Nazis."

"Now, how did you get in touch with him, Parrow?"

"Through the American service, oddly enough. Liaison was pretty good even before the war."

"What were you doing in the United States?" the Admiral asked.

"I had been sent out by the Austrian Republic to report on

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some new forestry techniques," Dennim answered. "When Hitler marched into Vienna, I didn't make any secret of my opinions, and somebody recommended me to the British as a useful man. In 1939 I was cut off by the blockade and couldn't—officially—return to Europe. But I did. I was taken to London secretly and trained for a year. Then I was sent back to the United States and told how to make my way to Vienna across the Pacific and through Russia. I managed it. At Vienna, I was again in touch with London through the underground."

"Not suspected?"

The fine angles of Dennim's face were pointed with irony. Cunobel was reminded of some confident squirrel flashing a swift look at the intruder before vanishing into the blackness of trees.

"Suspected? After completing a long and difficult journey to fight for Hitler? I was held up, sir, as an example of the penniless aristocrat who had made good. Then I was given a special unit—with some of our own Organization in it—and put on frontier control in the forests."

"But Buchenwald? Great blood and bones, a von Dennim in the Gestapo!"

"That was a punishment," Colonel Parrow explained. "Karl had engineered a mass escape of prisoners. But they could never prove it was deliberate. So the whole of his unit was dispersed and posted to the filthiest police jobs that could be found. He was sent as an officer to the concentration camp at Buchenwald."

"He was no more use to you then, I suppose?"

"By God, he was! There was never a day when he didn't risk torture and death. He was in charge of records and could read interrogations. That showed him what the enemy most wanted to know, and he had had long experience of the channels by which he could send the news back to us. Then there was his Scarlet Pimpernel stuff. I won't go into all that now. I'll just tell you it was he who smuggled Catherine Dessayes and Olga Coronel out of Ravensbrück when they were due for the gas chamber."

"What happened when the Buchenwald guards were arrested?" the Admiral asked.

"I just spirited him away."

"You didn't use him to give evidence at the War Trials?"

"No. His cover was never broken."

"Even if it was," said Dennim, "I can't believe the bomb in my letter-box was planted by some crazy ex-Nazi. Former enemies do not try to take revenge when war is over."

"Why didn't you return to Austria after the war?"

"With the Russians there, and a record that I had been a Gestapo officer?"

"I see. And you enjoy your genealogy?"

"Very much, sir. It is an excellent trade for a man without a home. He has all the past to live in."

"I never knew such a fellow for allowing himself to be lost sight of," Colonel Parrow exclaimed. "A man like you living on

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genealogy in a London suburb. But you never would take anything from anybody."

"It's a very responsible job, Parrow," the Admiral protested. "Gin, Dennim?"

"Thank you. With water. No pink."

"A most important job," Cunobel repeated. "Where does my name come from?"

"You claim, sir, to be in direct male descent from Cunobelinus—Shakespeare's Cymbeline—through King Mark of Cornwall."

"Claim, damn it! It is so."

"Traditionally. But isn't there a gap between the execution and attainder of Tristan Cunobel in 1141 and the birth of your undoubted ancestor, Humphrey Cunobel, in 1260?"

"Well, it beats the von Dennims anyway."

"In the direct male line. But if we include Hildegard who was heiress of the House of Hohenstaufen in her own right, my claim to any German Empire is rather better than that of the Hapsburgs—though not so good as your own, sir, to be Duke of Cornwall, and no more likely to be taken seriously."

"Ah, ha!" the Admiral neighed. "There's politeness for you. No wonder I kissed him in his cradle! Now, I'm going straight to business, von Dennim. Charles Dennim, I should say—and I'm proud and we're all proud that there is another English Dennim at last. You know your Major in Buchenwald, Gustav Sporn, was released from prison a year ago?"

"No, I did not. He ought to have been executed."

"He has been executed."

"By?"

"We don't know. And that is one of three cases. Walter Dickfuss was killed after serving his time."

"I see. Justice. He should have died slowly."

"He did, Charles," said Ian Parrow. "He was kept alive with great ingenuity for three days according to the medical evidence."

"Who was the third?"

"Hans Weber."

"But he was acquitted. He was just a stooge. The stupid sort of German who thinks that an order relieves him of all responsibility. He wasn't worth murdering. It's as petty as to take revenge on a private detailed for a firing squad."

"Perhaps that gives the motive. Why should you be next on the list?"

"I can't imagine. I was merely in charge of records."

"You might have appeared a mysterious figure," the Admiral suggested. "Someone closely connected with all the beastliness which went on, though never present. Suppose Gustav Sporn, before he died, had screamed that he only obeyed your orders."

"He might as well have put the blame on the camp cook."

"No. You use your imagination, my boy! Hauptmann von Dennim—who had never been tried—was a good choice for chief criminal if Sporn had to think fast. And then suppose that

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Dickfuss, who had lots of time to talk, picked up the theme and developed it."

"But if this avenging angel believes I was the power behind Sporn and Dickfuss, why doesn't he denounce me?"

"Because he's no fool, Charles," said Parrow. "He has run you to earth at last—a respectable genealogist with nothing to suggest you were not born here. He cannot possibly guess you were our agent, so he is bound to think you were promised immunity and British nationality for squealing on your former pals."

"If you have any suspect in mind, I could possibly tell you something about him."

"Damn it, he might be any one of a thousand!" Admiral Cunobel exclaimed. "We think we have limited that to about ninety. German police and Interpol have been right through their records, movements, and characters, and every one of them is less likely than the last. We're being forced to believe the fellow was never in Buchenwald at all. And Special Branch is in a flat spin. Lunatics with first-class brains and a grudge are their nightmare."

Dennim understood that assassin like an old friend. He remembered too well that his own hardest trial had been to resist the temptation to kill: to dig himself in with a Spandau and shoot down the Buchenwald staff till he was dead, or to eliminate them secretly and silently one by one. The man had only kept the determination to be revenged longer than himself, deliberately nurtured it, lived in it, and elaborated it. Certainly that was lunacy—but it had only been considered so in the last two or three hundred years. Before that, it had been thought a point of honour.

"I can't shed any tears for two of his victims," he said.

"And what about the rest?" the Admiral exploded. "What about an innocent postman? What about Hans Weber? What about you? How many other mistakes has he made that we don't know of?"

"I suppose it means I've got to be followed about by a lot of damned policemen."

"That—or leave to shoot first," Admiral Cunobel suggested.

"In England and the twentieth century?"

"So long as it was the right man."

"How do I know?"

"The Admiral and I," said Ian, "wondered if we could persuade you to choose your own territory. And when he talks of shooting, he is just being naval and provocative. Arrest, of course, is what he is after. Now, have some more gin, and let me explain."

Charles Dennim held out his glass and seated himself on the arm of an over-stuffed sofa. None of the three had yet really put his weight in a chair. The Admiral created around him too great a sense of urgency.

"Suppose I wanted to bump you off. Suppose I knew that so long as I was not actually seen on the job I could not be traced," Ian Parrow went on, "I would study your movements. Outside your house. On your way from Green Park Station to the London

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Library. On one of those routes I would slip a syringe into you, or push you off the platform of the Underground, and be part of the crowd again before you yelled. Patience, observation, and rehearsal—those are all I need. So long as you couldn't speak, I might even pick you up with every expression of horror. Got me?

"But suppose you are not in a town at all. Suppose you pretend to be in a panic and leave a trail which any fool could follow. You are living in a village, say. The moment there is a stranger about, you know it. The moment you see a Buchenwald face which you recognize you are ninety per cent certain. The odds, now, are in your favour. Cowardly assassination in a crowd is one thing; tracking down the former Graf von Dennim in open country is quite another. If he knew your record as well as I do, he wouldn't risk it."

Well, perhaps. But that youthful record was long out of date. The First War and inflation had wiped out most of his distinguished family and all of their estates and capital. He himself had taken a lonely job as a gamewarden in the Ruthenian forests. Then came the couple of years in America. And then there was no more time for enjoyment, only for the watchfulness and cautious movement which Dennim had learnt among the trees.

"I see," he said. "But I am forty-five now."

"So is he, probably. Bath chairs at fifty paces."

"Never heard such nonsense," shouted the Admiral. "Forty-five? A man's a mere boy yet. Bath chairs—good lord!".

The three settled down to discuss the practicability of the scheme. For Dennim's retirement Parrow suggested his own country in the north of Buckinghamshire. It was handy to London and not too thickly inhabited. He knew a furnished cottage where Charles could take refuge with his books and papers.

"Just where he might go," the Admiral agreed. "Nothing to do but farm, and no holidaymakers to confuse us. But how the devil does the fellow trace Dennim's address when he daren't ask questions of police and Post Offices? You put on a false beard and try it, Parrow. You'll be answering questions about yourself long before you have any information."

"He would merely have to write to me," Charles suggested. "For all I know we may be in correspondence already."

"Damned if I follow you."

"I have to work at my profession. Even if I ran away I should still have to work, and I should leave a forwarding address with the Post Office. I advertise at home and abroad, and get dozens of replies every week, mostly half-witted. Our friend has only to write to me with some genealogical inquiry. He has the postmark on the envelope. Obviously I would not post my letters in the village where I was, but I might risk any centre near by."

"Posting at Bletchley would be pretty safe," said Ian. "Almost too safe. He might give up the search for you and turn to other business till you came home again. How are we going to narrow it down a bit?"

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"The inquest on the postman—could you let something slip there?"

"Got it!" the Admiral exclaimed. "Inquest adjourned. Police let it slip that you are somewhere in the home counties. I'll have that repeated in one or two newspapers. On the face of it, we have given nothing away. You are somewhere in a population of twenty millions. But when our man gets a letter with the Bletchley postmark, he turns to the map. The only home county Dennim could be in is Buckinghamshire. And only a small part of that is within easy reach of Bletchley. He ought to run Dennim to earth in a couple of weeks. Don't see how he can suspect a trap, do you? He's done a neat piece of detective work from very little evidence."

"Wouldn't he expect me to have police protection?" Dennim asked.

"He'd be wrong if he did," replied Admiral Cunobel flatly. "Men are short. If you were really an ex-Gestapo officer on the run, we should just hide you and advise local police to keep an eye open."

"Look here," said Ian, "I don't think I like this. Charles has done enough."

"If you really believe there is no way of getting him but a decoy, I must, of course, take over," Dennim said. "I can't forget that poor postman in two halves. And Hans Weber. He's no great loss, but what needless savagery to murder him! This executioner is a dangerous nuisance, like a man-eating tiger. I don't want to have to kill him. I understand him too well. But I'll be the goat under the tree."

"You'll protect yourself, I hope," said the Admiral, much shocked by so un-naval a refusal to attack.

"I used to like the old Mauser pistol," Dennim replied, as if diffidently recommending a favourite bar which he had known in youth, "with the wooden holster which could be used as a butt. Inconspicuous if you carry it properly—and mine was dead accurate at 150 yards."

"I'll have one specially selected for you by a War Office armourer," Ian said. "You'd better not visit the range yourself."

"But don't you go thinking you're in Central Europe," the Admiral ordered, now swinging to the other extreme. "I want this man *identified*, and that's all. Don't, for the lord's sake, take the law into your own hands. He is bound to watch you and your contacts for days before he starts any monkey business. As soon as you are sure of him, you remember that a police car can do Scotland Yard to Buckingham in seventy minutes."

"I will remember with scrupulous care, sir," said Dennim, "that if I am not shot I am likely to be hanged. But the problem which bothers me more is Aunt Georgina. I cannot leave her in the house alone, and she must not suspect that my disappearance has anything to do with the bomb in our letter-box."

"Nervous, eh?"

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"Quite the opposite. She'd protest to the Lord Lieutenant, or put herself on guard with the lance she uses for tent-pegging."

"She looked so lovely on a horse," the Admiral said. "Does she keep many?"

"She is assistant mistress at a riding school—whenever they need her."

Admiral Cunobel cleared his throat and mixed some more pink gin. "My Vicar is in a mess," he announced. "He could do with some help."

"Her language . . ." Charles began.

"I didn't mean sewing his surplices. He has taken to horse-breeding, the bloody fool!"

Ian Parrow roared with laughter.

"Fact," insisted the Admiral, rather annoyed. "What's odd about it? If the Church won't pay parsons a living wage, they have to do what they can—well, mine think hes can breed horses."

"With an eye on the 2.30?" Ian asked.

"No, no, no! A crazy parishioner left him his pet Arab stallion. Keeps it in the glebe meadow. Not even properly fenced. Poor fellow spends all his money on oats and has to live on porridge himself. Georgi might make some sense out of it. Wouldn't be proper if she stayed with me, I suppose. I'll get the Vicar to put her up as my guest. Do you think she'd fall for it?"

"She might," said Charles, "if you make it sound like an important service to an old friend."

"It would be. I'm bothered sick about the Vicar. And I can't keep an eye on everything that goes on in the village any longer. All right, boy, I'll deal with that, and we'll leave the rest to Parrow. And don't give any address to the Post Office. I'll have your letters and Georgina's collected at your house by the C.I.D. and forwarded."

Charles Dennim looked out of his bedroom window with a rising of spirits which he had not felt for more years than he cared to count—not indeed since other early mornings in the Ruthenian forests. The odd thing was that this country of Ian's also gave the impression of forest. Far away to the north and east stretched the blue-hazed plain of the south Midlands—elm and oak as far as the eye could reach.

It was in fact open country with only a few small coverts where foxes bred under the clatter of wood pigeons, but hedgerows of hawthorn divided the fields, and seldom was there a hundred yards of hedge without a great tree in it.

The cottage which he had rented was known as The Warren. It was fairly comfortable, supplied with electricity, a telephone, and water piped from a spring at the back. Around the spring was a copse of willows, open enough—as he had observed with some relief—to give little cover except at night. In front was half an acre of overgrown garden and, touching its south-east corner, the Long Down—a stretch of well-drained upland which had been an

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airfield during the war. The desolate concrete runways, the air-raid shelters, and the aircraft bays were still there, but the rest was now open pasture for sheep and cattle.

He was thankful to be out of London. Though he always had a humorous and respectful affection for Aunt Georgina, the sense of duty which had led him to pool his income with hers so that she might live in comfort was wearing thin. And for the last week he had had no privacy in the house or out of it. The Admiral had staged a most convincing picture of bored police following him about and then deciding that they had done all that could reasonably be expected of them. When he vanished, it would be a fair deduction that the authorities had found him too expensive a nuisance and recommended a quiet retreat.

Quiet it certainly was. The nearest village was a mile away. He would take a bit of finding. But the essence of the plan was that the man should give himself away by unavoidable questions before he could come within charging distance.

Georgina had gone off, delighted, to the Admiral. A clever old crook, he was. His letter had not mentioned Charles at all. He had sounded like a fussy and affectionate old man, most bothered about his Vicar's stallion—Dennim hoped to heaven it was not half invention—and picking up an old friendship after forty years. Georgina had been a little conscience-stricken at leaving her nephew with no one to keep house for him, but Charles had assured her that he would take the opportunity of travelling round the Midlands to consult some parish and municipal records.

It was a Friday morning, the sixth since his arrival and a real beauty. The great pear-shaped trees hung motionless, awaiting the first trial of heat on the new leaves. After coffee and bacon he idled in the garden, wondering if it was worth while to take a hoe and discourage the weeds. The red Post Office van, so gay among the green of hedges and hay crop that only for a moment did it remind him of his shattered front door, delivered a batch of mail forwarded from London.

There was nothing in it from a stranger, which was hardly surprising. The first clue to his movements—a fairly prominent report in two evening papers that Mr. Dennim, genealogist, was suffering from shock and staying somewhere in the Home Counties—had only just been planted.

There were four letters from clients with whom he had already been in correspondence. His replies to them would carry the Bletchley postmark. One of the letters sounded hollow and pretentious—though there was nothing new in that—and had an address which might easily be an accommodation address. He decided to pass it to Cunobel, through Ian Parrow, for discreet investigation by the police.

To keep up the illusion that he was friendless and unprotected, Ian and he had decided to have no open communication, not even by telephone except in emergency. There was an optional rendezvous at four every afternoon. It was at a bridge over the

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slow Claydon brook on Ian's normal road to Buckingham. In the stream was a willow snag which he could see from his car. If it had its usual trailer of dead water-weed, all was well and there was nothing to report. If it was clear of weeds, Charles believed that he was in contact with the enemy and was waiting close by for an opportunity to report.

All over-dramatic, Dennim felt. They were just replaying war games, even to the point of organizing a few local men whom Ian could trust to keep their mouths shut. But the Admiral had been insistent that the danger was not to be underrated. Orders were to show himself, without any mysteriousness, in the two nearest villages, to use the roads as little as possible, and never to form a habit of travelling by predictable routes at predictable times. That was probably sound. It would be a waste of a good goat if he were to be killed by the nicely calculated swerve of a passing car.

During all this first week, while movement was presumably safe, he had completed a fast and thorough reconnaissance of his district. He decided that as soon as there was any suspicious sign of interest in him the Long Down would be his main line of communication. Moving across it by the farm tracks he could always be sure that he was not followed; and if he had any reason to suppose he was, he could vanish among the aircraft bays and the low brick foundations, overgrown by brambles, where huts had once been.

All that bothered him was the damned dog. It belonged—if it could be said to belong to anyone—to some feckless woman on the far side of the Long Down who worked in a factory at Stony Stratford and might or might not return at night. She left the animal outside her cottage with a dirty plate of bread and tinned dog food. It was a wonder she didn't expect it to open the tins as well. The dog spent its days on the Long Down, pouncing disconsolately on beetles, and was delighted to find a companion with nothing obvious and agricultural to do.

Dennim, on the other hand, had no need of any companion at all, and had something of a gamekeeper's view of dogs. They could chase and they could retrieve, but none of them—except a poacher's trained lurcher—could move as silently as a man. He might as well have reconnoitred his territory waving a red flag as followed by this unavoidable dog which had the bounce of a terrier and the reproachful affection of a spaniel—both very evidently among its ancestors.

He spent the morning answering his mail, and in the afternoon took a bus into Bletchley to post it. He had no car in London—for both he and Georgina preferred wine to petrol—and it would have appeared unnatural for a car to be suddenly at his disposal.

He did his shopping in Bletchley and returned to his cottage with veal cutlets, new potatoes, and peas. Then, feeling the need of human society with which to share his thirst and the perfection of the evening, he strolled carelessly through the lanes to his

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village of Kingston Buzzard and entered The Haunch of Mutton.

It was only a little after opening time, and though there would have been half a dozen eager customers in London, six was too early an hour for the country. The landlord was alone. He served Dennim with a long whisky-and-soda.

"Like it down here?" he asked.

"I do. It's a peaceful spot."

"Ah. Not much business, though."

"They watch the telly instead, I suppose?"

"Ah. They don't even read the papers, more than the local rag on Saturdays." He gave Dennim a broad wink.

"They haven't noticed where you came from," he said. "But I've seen that they know your name all right. Now, you'd better have one on the house. It'll help you to get over that shock."

He refilled his customer's glass without waiting for an answer.

"You try the bitter some time," he went on. "Colonel Parrow is a director of the brewery."

"What did he tell you about me?" Charles asked, for it seemed wise to take advantage of this marvellously oblique approach while they were still alone.

"Nothing—except that you or him would like to know if I heard strangers asking questions."

"And have you?"

"Know Isaac Purvis, don't you? He works on the roads."

"No."

"Well, he knows you. Said good morning to him the other day, you did, when he was clearing a ditch in Satters Bottom."

"I remember. A little dried-up chap in his sixties."

"Seventies, more like. Well, day before yesterday, a chap comes up to him and asks the way to Nash Road. That of any interest to you?"

Dennim realized that Ian Parrow was no less efficient as a popular farmer than as a colonel.

"It might be," he answered. "But there are four other houses along Nash Road besides my cottage."

"Mr. Purvis tried to hold him in conversation, and he's a rare one for that. Lucky if you get away after half an hour of the Council's time! But he couldn't keep him. He noticed the chap didn't go in to Worrals, and I saw Slade and Parrish, and he didn't go there. So that only leaves you and Mrs. Bunn—who never has a visitor, I'd say, but the Vicar and the district nurse."

"What sort of man was he?"

"Big, dark man, clean-shaven. And a gentleman, Mr. Purvis said."

"Thank you. You seem to have had some experience of this sort of thing."

"I used to be mess sergeant in one of them hush-hush joints of the Colonel's," the landlord replied. "You'd be surprised how much I used to hear once they got in the habit of not stopping talking when I came round with the drinks."

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On his leisurely way back to the cottage Dennim decided that the inquirer had probably been sent up by the C.I.D. or Special Branch to familiarize himself with the district. It was too soon for the arrival of the tiger. He had, however, one uncomfortable doubt depending on a point of English subtlety which he understood in principle from its continental parallels, but where Aunt Georgina would have been on surer ground.

A well-spoken, well-educated policeman would certainly be described as a gentleman by any of the younger generation who used the outdated word at all, but could he deceive all those unconscious depths of instinct and experience in an old and prejudiced agricultural labourer? Dennim had a feeling that when Isaac Purvis described a man as a gentleman he meant the manner and clothes of someone born to the ownership of land—but analysis was meaningless. It was no longer possible to put into words what he meant. All the same, he reminded himself that any doubt was still a doubt and that—just as a matter of practice—it might be well to begin a proper standard of alertness. He went home across the fields, passing cautiously through the willow screen to his back door.

The evening sun flooded into the kitchen through the open window. All the sounds were peaceful. Under the window the damned dog was snoring. Above it a bee and two bluebottles were noisily trying to get out in the one place where it was impossible. A chewed mess of brown paper and string was on the floor. The veal cutlets which he had left on the kitchen table were inside that infernal mongrel.

Dennim had already opened his mouth to rouse it from its stertorous slumber when he realized that its position under the window, its falling asleep instead of escaping with the loot, its continuing to sleep, were all wholly unnatural. He backed through the door, remembering that the murderer of Sporn, Weber, and Dickfuss liked to be in at the death. But summer silence was still absolute except for the cawing of a rook and the faint click of the Mauser's safety-catch.

The cottage was a square box with two rooms and a bathroom upstairs, two rooms and a kitchen downstairs. Dennim assumed that death was crouching in every one of them. His right arm, half his face, and the Mauser offered the smallest possible target as he flung open each door and followed his gun into the room. They were all empty.

The willow copse he knew was empty, for he had just been through it to the back door. He disappeared into it, keeping the house between himself and the garden, and reached the shelter of the boundary hedge and its ditch. Very slowly he followed the ditch right round to the front gate and back again, inspecting every likely patch of cover. There was no doubt that on his own ground he was alone.

He re-entered the house by the back door and sat down in the

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living-room, first brushing the chair with his hand. Damn the infernal care which was going to be needed! Routines would be indispensable—like shaking out your boots in the tropics before you put them on, and examining your bedding.

Now what exactly had happened? The first obvious fact was that the tiger had decided that speed was safer than caution. He had judged quite correctly that, whatever arrangements the police made for guarding Hauptmann von Dennim, both they and he would be taking things easy for the first few days. As for finding out his exact address, the fellow must have done what the Admiral said was impossible—told a good story to the police, asked for the forwarding address, and got a direct reply.

His return from Bletchley had been observed and his departure for the pub. This dedicated murderer had then poisoned his cutlets—it might be wise to suspect the sugar and the salt, too—and cleared off without waiting for the result. He might have had a car innocently parked a few miles away, and be now safely on his way to London.

Dennim felt secure enough to light a pipe. He did not, however, replace his Mauser in the holster, balancing it in his broad hand with the long barrel stretching up his forearm, as if it were a confidant which could discuss the problem as well as end it. He observed that his arm was trembling, but a lack of recent practice in crawling through ditches would account for that.

The damned dog—the blessed dog—was not yet dead. That had to be explained. When you could not be certain of the movements of police and victim, surely you would use a fast poison? Perhaps there was not one which was quite tasteless or, if there was, the chap could not lay his hands on it. After all, he had not the resources of a government or a terrorist gang behind him. He worked alone. This was an occasion when the telephone could be used, and the sooner the better.

He lifted the receiver to call Ian, and found that the line was dead. A moment's inspection showed that the wire had been cut outside the kitchen where it entered the house.

That puzzled him. Suppose he had discovered the break before he had supper? Suppose there was an arrangement with the police that they were to call at fixed hours and turn up at once if there was no reply? Something of the sort must have occurred to the man before he cut the telephone. But the answer was easy. The drug or poison did not work instantaneously. There was half a minute or more when you felt so queer that your one impulse would be to telephone a doctor. You would have no time to search for an easily repairable cut in the wire. All right then—look at it this way. Put the victim out with a drug. Wait close by to see what happens. If somebody calls on him, clear off. If nobody calls, come in at leisure and finish him off with a knife.

In that case there was an opportunity for a police cordon. But the Mauser, reflecting on its blue barrel the complexities of the slanting sunlight and of his thoughts, pointed out that it was most

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unlikely that Hauptmann von Dennim had been seen entering the house from the back. Therefore, from the point of view of the tiger, he had not yet come home and eaten his supper. That, as time went on, would seem suspicious, and doubt would be reinforced by ordinary human impatience. The fellow might remove himself and very cautiously return in the small hours of the morning to find police and cars cordoning the area in which he very fortunately was not.

Damn! Then Hauptmann von Dennim had to come home plainly and openly by the front gate. A nice job that would be. Still, the assassin could have shot him half a dozen times in the last unsuspecting days, and had presumably refrained because he couldn't be sure of not starting a gun battle. It was unlikely that he would risk it now, while the cutlets were waiting.

There was nothing for it but to have a good look round and then take that walk. Dennim put the Mauser back in its holster, slung a pair of binoculars round his neck, and went out cautiously by the back door. On the west side of the willow copse was a tall oak. Climbing trees after too many sedentary years was not a sport which appealed to him. Resistance rather than violent exercise was his best asset. But if the ivy would hold him for the first fifteen feet the rest looked simple.

From his perch of thirty feet above the ground, the character of the country immediately surrounding him changed completely. The apparent closing in of timber and hedges upon his cottage was a false impression. He could be sure that the two angles where his track met the road were clear, but could not of course see through the hedge on the far side of the road. It would be no place, however, to skulk in hiding and arouse suspicion. The upper windows of the farm they called Worrals overlooked it, and the field was full of chickens scuttering and squawking.

The watcher might be farther up the road; but wherever he was he could never feel secure. The farms were busy and the fields were too open. If he had cover to his front, he had none behind him. In fact the only place to lie up and observe was precisely that which did not appear, close to his cottage, to have any cover at all—the Long Down. Alternatively, the man could be up a tree, in which case there they were like a pair of apes staring at each other with binoculars and seeing nothing.

Either way, Long Down or tree, the police could not be on the job till after sunset, and the chance of catching in darkness a person who was certainly no ordinary townsman was nil. The trap would be sprung, and the Admiral would have to start all over again. This was a single-handed job if ever there was one. It was useless to go back to the cottage and repair the telephone.

Charles climbed down and made his way to Kingston Buzzard across country. So far as the Long Down was concerned, he was in dead ground. From trees on or near the road he used the line of the hedges to protect himself. It was slow going, for he had to squeeze like a rabbit under wire and through thorn. He had

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less faith than ever in police cordons and cars. A horse was the only way of moving fast over this country of meadow, fence, and muddy stream.

He strolled home again, this time openly and along the road, trying to persuade himself that there were no holes in his reasoning. About halfway to his cottage it occurred to him that there was a large hole. The man might have already discovered the drugged dog. In that case a close-range shot from behind either of the hedges bordering the road could fit the man's plans just as well.

He realized at last that this lonely work demanded a different kind of courage from any he had ever employed. For most of the war he had felt one of a team, commanding and obeying other Austrians in their secret battle against the German enemy. Certainly he had feared, till he grew accustomed to the thought, arrest and execution; but never assassination at any time—in any food, from behind any hedge.

And defence was so limited. He could not shoot first. He knew very well that he could not bring himself to do so, quite apart from the risk, which the Admiral had pointed out, of being put on trial for manslaughter. He could not call in the police without strong evidence of the man's identity and intentions; and it was very possible that identity could not be established at all until the assassin was caught on the body of his victim. The parallel with a man-eating tiger was uncomfortably close. In the long run, the odds against the tiger escaping his hunters were formidable. But in the short run and on any unfrequented road with night coming on, the goat had not even a sporting chance.

The sun had set, and light was patchy. The leaves of the eastern hedge reflected the red of clouds and emphasized every block of darkness. Under the shadow of the western hedge, solid and space were dark grey, and equally deceptive. There was no sort of safety in vision, and instinct could not discriminate since danger was everywhere. His eyes were continually attracted by the light in the west, and what was ahead of him appeared the darker. He had to remind himself again and again why he was taking this risk. Because he had to be seen coming home.

Because then, after giving him a chance to eat his poisoned meal, the tiger would come to find the body on the floor. But the body would be very much alive, and a post-mortem on that dog would justify whatever use of the Mauser he had to make.

All woulds. All mights. There was no guessing what this sort of animal would do or where it was. The only thing predictable was its ferocity. And meanwhile reality was a panic of hedge and shadow, of reflected colours like bright blood and dried blood.

Once he ran three steps and checked himself with an effort. Once when he saw a broken oak twig pointing straight at him, he dived into the ditch. Caution was all right, but this was shameful caution. Graf von Dennim did not, he swore at himself, dive into ditches. Let the fellow shoot, and be damned to him!

He found such pride surprisingly calming. This conjuring up

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of a Graf von Dennim, who had had no real existence since he was about sixteen, seemed to make sense of his duty. Charles Dennim, genealogist, was calling himself a bloody fool for ever accepting it; but Graf von Dennim, having taken British nationality, had no doubt that he owed feudal service to the Crown. And it made no difference at all that not one of the mass of public servants who made up the Crown—including superannuated admirals—would believe that he literally thought so.

Charles was grimly pleased by the oddness of his own romancing, and paid more intelligent attention to the narrow, shadowy road. It would have been pleasanter to render feudal service with a few retainers and a drawn sword than to walk through grey-green darkness with a Mauser which had to be kept hidden under the arm-pit until it was too late to draw it. But at least he could now listen to his own lonely steps padding along the road without thinking them objectless as the ticking of a clock.

He turned at last into the track which led to his cottage, and home by the gate. In case he was still watched he preserved his air of unconcern, but the Mauser, hidden by his body from the garden, was in his hand when he opened the front door. Again he searched the rooms, coming last to the kitchen. The snoring had stopped. The dog had been removed. All that remained was the torn, chewed paper on the floor, and other evidence carefully left in place under the window that a dog had been about. The telephone wire had been inconspicuously repaired, but there was no point now in recounting to Ian—and the local exchange—so complicated and unsatisfactory a story.

It was impossible to be quite sure of any theory at all. Had his first homecoming and stealthy departure been observed? Possibly, but in that case so cautious and invisible a murderer would not have come back to remove the dog when he knew very well that Dennim's suspicions had been aroused and he had not the least idea where he was. To take such a risk did not sound in character. No, it was more probable that he had waited and waited for his victim's return, lost patience when the light began to fade and come to the conclusion that Dennim had returned unseen. Then he crept close enough to hear the snoring, entered boldly and found—only a dog.

Well, in such a mist of uncertainty that theory would have to do till morning. Dennim retired to his bedroom with a bottle of beer and an unopened tin of corned beef. When he had finished his meal, he turned out the lights and quietly vanished into the willow copse with blankets and a ground sheet. He went to sleep alongside a fallen log, quite confident from old experience that in pitch darkness nobody could distinguish one from the other.

Admiral Cunobel had not felt so uneasily on the defensive since 1918. He was, he now reminded himself, in a commanding position with his back to his own fireplace after an excellent lunch, but in front of him, and a little taller, was Georgina Dennim.

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"But I still fail entirely to see what you expect me to do for your Vicar, Peregrine," she insisted.

"Well, Georgi, you must admit he was living on porridge."

"And very right, too. Nur Jehan is worth a temporary sacrifice."

"But the wretched stallion doesn't seem to . . ."

"There are several troubles with Nur Jehan, Peregrine, and you were always easily shocked. It's a pity you never married."

"Dammit," said the Admiral, "I . . ."

"And Mariana is perfectly capable of dealing with them."

"She would be."

"That is most ungallant, Peregrine. Mariana's private life is her own concern. We are interested in her, or so I believe, only as a horsewoman."

"Well, I wish she had never allowed her father to accept the animal."

"Why?"

"Great blood and bones, the fences for one thing!"

"The Vicar is getting on with them as fast as he possibly can single-handed, and you know it. Instead of blustering, Peregrine, you might answer my question."

"What question?"

"Just why did you want to get me out of the house?"

"Well, Georgi, I have to admit the Vicar was an excuse," said the Admiral with what he knew—for it had triumphantly carried off many a deception in his time—was an expression of manly frankness. "Read your name in the paper. Horrid case. Poor girl's nerves blown to pieces. Why not pick up friendship after all these years? And you know it does help the Vicar to have you as a paying-guest. I hope he and Mariana are looking after you properly."

"Of course they are. I took over the kitchen immediately."

"Good lord, Vienna seems only yesterday! And you've changed so little. Still the straight, divine Georgi."

"Oh, my dear, how quickly the years pass. But I suppose I do look all right on a horse at a hundred yards, so long as one knows which is which. All the same, Peregrine, I shall go back on Wednesday."

"Now, Georgi, you are better out of the house till that nephew of yours comes home."

"He'll be perfectly ready to come home on Wednesday. Much rather be in his study than anywhere else."

"No doubt," said the Admiral. "But suppose he couldn't?"

"I shall send him a wire this afternoon and find out."

"Where is he staying?"

"The Warren, Nash Road, Kingston Buzzard."

Admiral Cunobel somehow stopped himself asking how she had got hold of an address which was known only to the C.I.D. and himself. He hissed like the tortoise he resembled, and changed the noise into a clearing of the throat.

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"Sorry, my dear—need some new teeth! I thought you said he was touring the Midlands. Old documents or something."

"So he is. I suppose it's a guest-house which he uses as headquarters."

"What did he think about that bomb?" the Admiral asked.

"The Dennims have always had an exasperating habit of protecting their womenfolk, Peregrine. I do not know what Charles thinks. Nor can I imagine why an impertinent evening paper should describe him as suffering from shock. I never knew anyone less likely to suffer from shock. But the police are taking it seriously, as I think they should."

"Are they indeed, Georgi?"

"I found a young man examining our letters."

"Bless my soul! When was that?"

"Just when I was coming down here. Charles dropped me at Paddington Station on his way to Euston, and then I suddenly remembered I ought to have packed my boots and breeches."

"You look very well in jodhpurs."

"But you might have wanted me to show Nur Jehan, and I couldn't know that you weren't all terribly smart. So I went back to the house to get them, let myself in, and found a young man in the hall. He showed me his police card, of course, but I told him he might have pinched the dam' thing for all I knew. So he explained that his orders were to examine all letters and send them on, and he gave me my own forwarding address and Charles's as proof. Good enough, don't you think, Peregrine?"

"Oh, quite."

"Well, it turned out very handy, as a matter of fact. As I had missed the morning train, I had lunch at home and caught the five-thirty. I was just leaving the house when a client of Charles's telephoned and wanted to get in touch with him urgently. So I could give him the address."

"Anyone you know?"

"No. My nephew's clients very seldom come to the house."

"He gave you his name, I suppose?"

"Now I come to think of it, I don't believe he did. He knew mine, though. Asked me if I was Mrs. Georgina von Dennim. God knows where he got the von! Charles hasn't used it since he settled in England. And my husband's family never did."

"I really feel you ought to help the Vicar for another week or two, Georgi. On your own showing, that house of yours is swarming with police. I mean, it would be quite impossible coming home and never knowing whether half Scotland Yard was in the kitchen."

"I'll think about it, Peregrine. It is such lovely country."

It was. Admiral Cunobel had chosen for his retirement a grey stone Jacobean farmhouse on the southern tip of the Cotswolds, where he was entirely happy with village affairs and his garden. He had very nearly refused to go back into government harness because the job would keep him in London all the week.

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And now the weekend which, beginning with this lunch, he had hoped to spend in sentimental admiration of Georgi, was ruined. He had to get in touch with Colonel Parrow at once, and Dennim too, if possible. He silently damned the soul and training of that over-zealous young detective who had popped into the Dennim's house the moment they were out of it.

He led Georgina amiably through the garden on her way back to the vicarage, and then returned to house and telephone with a rapid, stumping waddle which was almost a run.

"That you, Parrow? Warn our friend at once that his address is known where it shouldn't be."

"Call on him, you mean?"

"Certainly not. Got some arrangement with him, haven't you? I'll start now and meet you outside Oxford Police Station about six. Meanwhile, keep your eyes open."

"Make it a bit clearer, sir."

"Clearer? Clearer? We were going to grab the tiger while he was trying to stalk the goat, weren't we? Well, he hasn't got to do a stalk at all. He could be on him—right now. Hell's bells, and I go and stick him in a lonely cottage! Thank God he has been through worse risks than this."

"He has not, sir," said Ian angrily, and hung up . . .

Ian Parrow drove slowly towards Buckingham, and at four precisely came to the bridge. The old willow snag in the muddy stream had no tail of dead water-weed undulating in the slow current. That was the signal that contact had been made. Ian waited for ten minutes for Charles to appear and tell him what had happened and what help he needed. When there was no sign of him he drove on, extremely anxious and determined to telephone the cottage from the first box he came to.

Half a mile up the road he saw old Isaac Purvis leisurely scything the young nettles on the green verge of the road. He appeared to be doing a job which the Works and Highways Department of the County Council could well have left till August.

The old man leaned on his scythe when he saw the car approaching, his whole attitude an invitation to stop and talk, though without any sign at all obvious to a world which did not know his habits. Ian got out and joined him on the roadside.

"Weeds coming on fast this year, Mr. Purvis," Ian remarked.

"Grass is what I were cutting," said the old man, "a goodish step back, t'other side of the bridge." He waited with mischievous eyes to be asked why he had moved. Ian did so.

"You go on up the road, Mr. Purvis, 'e says, and when you sees Colonel Parrow you give 'im this 'ere."

He slid into the Colonel's hand a sheet torn from a notebook, as if he were passing a betting slip under the eye of the police.

Dear Ian, Advise Admiral all available police should look out for a big, dark man entering a parked car this evening, and take the number. Purvis will give you the man's description. The car should be somewhere inconspicuous a few miles east of Kingston

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Buzzard, on the road or in a village. Meet me in Buckingham at 7.30 tonight. I'll be dining in the hotel. Don't recognize me till I recognize you.

"How long ago did Mr. Dennim give you this?" Ian asked.

"Might be 'alf an hour, sir. Might be more. Told me to make like I was working on the road and look out for you, 'e did."

"Very kind of you, Mr. Purvis. What about this big, dark man?"

"A pleasant-spoken gentleman," said Isaac Purvis doubtfully.

"What else?"

"Got something on 'is mind, 'e 'as."

"How do you mean exactly?"

"Remember what old Worral looked like after 'is eldest son 'ad been took to the mad'ouse? Just as pleasant as ever, 'e was, and you'd 'ave said 'e thought nothing of it. But one day 'e says to me, 'e says, 'God Almighty is goin' to pay me for that, Mr. Purvis.'"

"I see. Yes. Poor old Worral—it did break him up. What sort of age was the dark gentleman?"

"Goin' a bit grey like us."

"Over fifty or under?"

"Well, I wouldn't say he'd see forty again."

"Eyes?"

"Couldn't say, sir. Darkish-like. Thick, black eyebrows."

"Good for you, Mr. Purvis. What about his clothes?"

"Brownish suit 'e was wearing and a cap when I sees 'im three days ago—and the professor said I was to tell you as 'e's wearing the brownish suit today."

Ian was about to deny that Charles was any sort of professor. But if his local scouts had created by themselves a myth that he was, they might as well be left to enjoy it. It was something of that quick, evasive, woodland manner, he supposed, and something of the fact that he lived alone with a lot of paper.

"Would you say that the big, dark man was a foreigner?"

"Well, all I've seen of 'im was when 'e asks me the way to Nash Road three days back. I tells 'im. And then I asks 'im if 'e weren't the new undertaker what Mrs. Bunn wishes to make 'er own bargain with. 'E just says thank you, and that 'e weren't.

"'Course I knew 'e wasn't. 'E was just out for a long walk in a manner of speakin' as if 'e owned the place. But I says to myself afterwards, I says, now if 'e was the kind of chap what ain't in no 'urry and walks when 'e could do it easier in 'is car, then 'e'd like to 'ear about Mrs. Bunn makin' 'er own arrangements with the undertaker. So I wouldn't say 'e ain't a foreigner, and I wouldn't say 'e is."

Mr. Purvis was obviously willing to discuss till five o'clock the character of Englishmen, by which he meant the inhabitants of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. Ian, who did not wish to offend so useful an assistant by cutting him short or presenting him too abruptly with ten shillings, had to allow him his head.

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In any case there was nothing to be done immediately. He himself had no authority to give orders to the police, and the Admiral would be already on the road . . .

He was in Oxford at half past five. Cunobel, too, was ahead of schedule and waiting. After reading Dennim's note, the Admiral at once occupied the police station as if it had been the bridge of a battleship. Ian had the impression that the credentials which he produced were entirely unfamiliar and that—until Scotland Yard was at the other end of the phone—he was depending on nothing but a confident habit of command.

"About all we can do," said the Admiral, at last putting down the telephone and swallowing a boiling cup of police tea as if it was beer, "is to watch every small car park within possible walking distance of Kingston Buzzard. We don't think he is likely to leave his car up a track or by the roadside where it might attract attention. What he would do is to leave it in a village wherever there are two or three others. Don't understand myself what Dennim is up to." He turned to the telephone again.

"But how did the address get out?" Ian asked.

"The divine Georgi, damn her!" replied the Admiral affectionately. "Explain to you later. Now you get on to Buckingham. If you want me, you'll find me asleep in my car outside the railway station, wherever that may be. Any time up to nine. I'll go home then. Got to conserve energy at my age."

Ian Parrow waited in the lounge of the Buckingham hotel, feeling guilty and inefficient. He had only been brought into this doubtful scheme of the Admiral's because Charles would trust him, and it was too like a confidence trick. With Charles—far more than with other agents whom he had directed—he had always felt that he had a common standard of values. That deep friendship was now reinforced by pity.

He remembered the Graf von Dennim who had come to him for training in 1939, composed of gallantry and gaiety which at first suggested that he would be of doubtful value as a secret agent. All that had been changed by his terrible experience in the Gestapo. In fact, when one came to think of it, he had been tortured just as surely as if he had fallen into their hands. And all the reward he had ever got for it was a lonely life as a genealogist. Ian swore that, when this folly was over, he should be extracted from that suburb of his, with or without aunt, and put in something like his proper setting.

A little after half past seven Charles walked in through the open windows of the lounge and passed him without a word. So far as appearances went, he looked a good deal more like a sharp-featured, hard-driven farmer who had had trouble with his tractor than the professor which was Isaac Purvis's guess. His knees were wet and earthy, his face streaked with mud, his shoes filthy, and there was a long tear in his trousers. He was more presentable when he returned from the basins and hot water, and dropped into a chair alongside.

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" Charles, this has got to stop," said Ian.

" I don't think it can now, old friend. It looks as if I must kill or be killed, and I hate them both about equally. Shall we go in? I am very hungry. I have just had a look round the dining-room to be on the safe side."

Over dinner Dennim told him in a low voice of the happenings of the night before, of the dog which stole his veal and of its unexpected disappearance.

" The tiger lost patience," he said. " I am sure of that now."

" And you slept? "

" Enough. I had been so afraid that I was ashamed of myself by that time. And it was most unlikely that he would risk looking for me in the copse in darkness. He doesn't take chances like that.

" When I had pulled myself together, dozed under the trees a little, and thought it out, I was quite satisfied he had gone.

" I felt sure, too, that he had never been in a tree, or near the road. So where was he? On the Long Down, with a perfect view of the track, the gate, and the front door, but nothing else. I should have known it. The man has an eye for country, and he thinks as I do. Once he had reconnoitred the district, the Long Down stands out as the obvious approach."

" It's like blindfold chess," Ian protested.

" Worse than that. It's like the German Intelligence chess. You do not ever see your opponent's men at all; but a referee tells you when a move is impossible, and when you have taken or lost a piece. From that you must form your own picture of the board."

" But why in heaven's name didn't you send for the police? "

" What good would it do? He was not likely to be spending the night on the Long Down. No doubt he disposed of the dog and was off to London or wherever he is staying. I reckoned he might be back this morning. Now is his chance, you see. None of his moves has led him into trouble. He thinks what we want him to think—that I have been hidden. The moment he gets suspicious, he'll break contact and wait for an easier chance to kill me. That is why I shall not call on the police until I know either where he is or who he is."

" Did he turn up this morning? "

" Yes. I went indoors at dawn. At nine I opened my front door. I idled openly—even breakfasted in the garden where he could see me."

" On what? "

" Oh, I looked over the loaf very carefully and only ate the middle of it. Then I took out a deck chair and some papers, and settled down under cover of the shrubbery.

" What I was up to was this. If he were on the Long Down watching the front of the house, he must be in sight from the upstairs windows. So the only time he can afford even to stretch himself and scratch is when I am out in the garden. I thought there might be a chance of picking him out with glasses from

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behind the curtains, and I returned to the house on my stomach by way of the ditch and the back door.

"There was no sign of him. I gave him up. I took to watching a hare which was hopping along the skyline two hundred yards away. A hare, you know, only sees at the last moment what is in front of him; he can see perfectly well what is behind. So when he jinked and galloped off at an angle to his feeding course, I knew the exact spot where something had frightened him. Then I picked up a black line behind the grass. It was the top of the entrance to an old air-raid shelter. The tiger could stand on the steps of the shelter and look out without a chance of being seen by me or anyone else. Luck for me that he daren't carry a rifle about! Or perhaps a range of two hundred is too much of a gamble for him."

"This is intolerable," said Ian.

"I thought so, too. But it isn't if one goes at it gently. I could not tell what was in the air-raid shelter. It might be a retired bishop writing a monograph on the reproduction cycle of the hare. So I wondered if he would take an opportunity to show his intentions. There seemed no reason why he shouldn't—if he was really the tiger and as enterprising as we believe.

"I worked my way back to the shrubbery, and returned openly to the house carrying my deck chair. Then I set off by the front gate for a casual stroll with a book under my arm.

"I skirted the edge of the Long Down quite close to his shelter and followed a lane westwards. It ran pretty straight for a quarter of a mile. Not lonely at all. There are always people about in this country of yours except at night. By the time I got to the end of the straight there were two men behind me, and a woman on a bicycle. One of the men was a biggish fellow and coming along at a good pace. I hoped he was the right one.

"The lane brought me to the Aylesbury road just outside Adstock. I loitered a little to let him pick up the trail and then turned into Adstock Church—which is just what I would have done if my mind had been on my profession. I hoped he would come in too, so that I could have a good look at him. But he drew the line at that.

"I met the gravedigger and had a chat with him. That was useful. I don't mean that I was making my own arrangements like that Mrs. Bunn whose gallows-humour seems to amuse them all so much in Kingston Buzzard. It allowed me to walk through the churchyard deep in conversation and keep my eyes open. A big man in a brownish suit was strolling away from the church and eating a sandwich. That reminded me that it was about lunch-time and that it would be natural to show an appetite. So I bought a packet of biscuits.

"It was the devil of a job to make it easy for him not to lose me, for of course he could not show too openly that he was following. I started along the main road from Aylesbury to Buckingham, where he could keep me in sight without trouble. At Padbury

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I turned north, with him still on my tail. Then I deliberately lost him, for I wanted to get to the bridge over the Claydon Brook and clear the weed so that you would know something was up. On the way there I ran into Isaac Purvis and gave him the note for you.

" The tiger's breath was a bit too hot on my back to risk stopping to talk to you. My plan was to delay him so that he would not get back to his car till the late evening. That gave the police a chance to identify him if he parks it somewhere to the east of Kingston Buzzard. Of course we aren't sure that he does. We only know that Purvis first saw him walking from that direction.

" It didn't take me long to pick the fellow up again. After he lost me, he naturally went back towards Kingston Buzzard. It was his best chance of making contact—or perhaps of getting to the cottage before me and examining the larder. I've left an open tin of corned beef for him, by the way. I had a tough time getting ahead of him without being spotted. Over hedges and through barbed wire. Damn these little fields of yours! I had to do it twice, too. Once so that I could see his face through a hedge as he passed, and again so that he could think he had caught me up."

" Who is the Tiger? Did you know him? " Ian asked.

© Geoffrey Household 1958

★ ***The last part of Tie up a Goat, by Geoffrey Household, appears in next month's Argosy on sale August 8.***

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to STATIONARY on page 20

1. *Printers' festival, held on Saint Bartholomew's Day, at the beginning of the season when early evenings made work by candlelight necessary.*
2. *The Greeks wore them; the famous Phrygian cap was made of felt.*
3. *i. Fishing for sunken torpedoes; ii. Admiralty-issued clothes or food; iii. Ginger ale and brandy; iv. a bloater.*
4. *i. Solo whist; ii. Polo; iii. Lacrosse; iv. Ski-ing; v. Badminton.*
5. *They are respectively, butterfly, orchis, bird, and wild flower.*
6. *Coins, biology, sea-shells.*
7. *Yes, in " Queen Elizabeth," a four-reel drama made in 1912.*
8. *A Lozenge is a diamond-shaped figure, holding a widow or spinster's arms; a Mond is an orb; a Wyvern is a dragon with small wings; Undy means wavy.*
9. *In 1900; it was the old Central London Electric Railway.*

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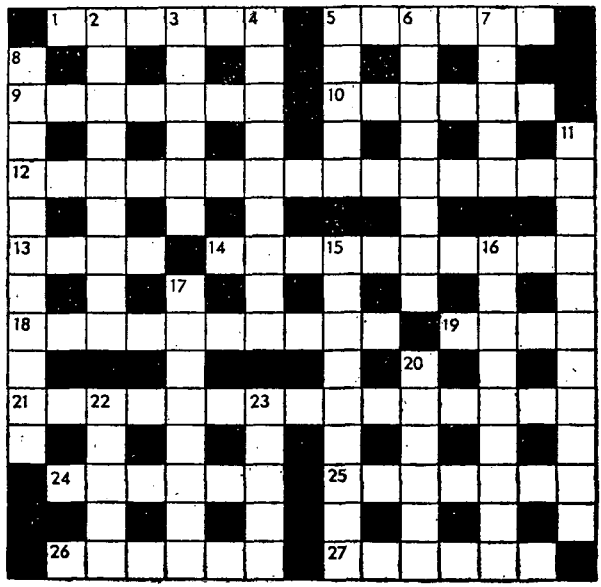
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 30

★



CLUES

Across

1 Liquorish prelate (6).

5 Try streets for meetings (6).

9 Corrupt, yet ever a D.P. (7).

10 " The —— that patient merit of the unworthy takes" (Hamlet) (6).

12 Pussy's gymnasium? (4, 2, 5, 1, 3).

13 Just market (4).

14 Haste is to Delay, said Tennyson (4-6).

18 Dressing up, all shipshape (7, 3).

19 Laughing barrier (4).

21 Converse of head in the clouds ? (5, 3, 7).

24 Two-seater county (6).

25 Send me north-east, sister, it's fate (7).

26 But her offspring aren't chick-peas (6).

27 Wearing emphasis (6).

Down

2 I'm testing, getting better (9).

3 Fifty in common makes toast (6).

4 Bunch of journalists enlisting support? (5-4).

5 Italian composer, shorter than Saxon earl (5).

6 Van Winkle before forty winks ? (5, 3).

7 Bracing musical notation (5).

8 Our side roof's a sweet-scented mix-up (11).

11 Advice to Finnigan paraphrased (5, 6).

15 Breezy but unreliable confidants, blow it ! (4, 5).

16 Cheat Tess and broach the souchong (3-6).

17 A loftier curve in the church ? (8).

20 Pilgrim could be a conjurer (6).

22 Pendent fruit, by the sound (5).

23 He's handy but musically muddled (5).

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